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THE
HEN-PECKED HUSBAND.

A NOVEL,

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "THE M.P.'S WIFE."


IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

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THE HEN-PECKED HUSBAND.

CHAPTER I.

ms. Langdon. 6 Aug. 53
THERE are some houses in London, well situated and well appointed—forming one of a number bearing the happy reputation of ‘good,’ (i. e. fashionable,) and placed in the heart of the gayest throngs, yet into which the eye of the world seldom penetrates, and of which its busy tongue is silent from pure inability to talk.

Genl. Des. Ray 11 D 52 Thorpe 3v.
Of this description was a house in Hill Street, Berkeley Square; you might look back for years and years in any old Directory and still to the same number you would find affixed the same name of “Chetwode,” though the

family themselves were little known. Everyone in the street must have been familiar with the old-fashioned, cream-coloured chariot which came round to the door so regularly every afternoon, but it was never kept waiting long enough for neighbouring coachmen to exchange intelligent glances. Everyone knew the elderly footman too by sight, but he never lounged at the door in the gay season, as did his fraternity, for he felt he was not smart enough—neither did he linger there to renew friendships when the family returned to town for Christmas—he knew he was not strong enough to brave a chill—in short that house was unlike all the rest in every particular, for even externally it was narrower and more dingy than the others.

Nevertheless there was “contentment therein.” Its quiet inmates neither courted observation nor provoked remark—the turmoil of each returning season was nothing to them, and the ceaseless roll of carriages fell on indifferent ears, for they took no part in the gaiety.

A trio inhabited that house—a mother, son and step-daughter; Mrs. Chetwode had gone to it as a bride and now lived there as a widow; attached to it from cherished associations, she felt she could be happy in no other, yet from the hour that a funeral had left its doors, sadness, which had subsided into perfect quietude, filled the rooms which might have been given to scenes of festivity.

Another reason had tended to prevent her again mixing in society—the blight that had fallen on the existence of her step-daughter Marian Chetwode; she was one of a despised class, thanks to the verdict of a generous world, which despiseth spinsters! but she had had happier prospects once—that was a tale too often told—the prospects were not fated to be realised, and Marian Chetwode at seven-and-thirty was going down hill, when as a married woman she might have been in her zenith.

But the delight of Mrs. Chetwode's heart, the light of the old lady's eyes, was her son,

her only one, her excellent Mark, the paragon of his sex, and the child who had never given his parent a moment's uneasiness since the anxious hours of his babyhood!—she loved her step-daughter with all a mother's fondness, for she had watched over her childhood, and felt for her as her own, but her son was her stay, her support, and her pride; from the hour that he left home in the morning to the moment when his accustomed knock told her of his safe return, her system was not in the same state of tranquillity which made their quiet evenings so happy.

Mr. Chetwode was in the law, and that profession favoured the mode of life which his mother had adopted; the unvarying regularity had become a habit to him; and we all know how easily we fall into a distaste for society unless we are constantly keeping up the ball, so Mr. Chetwode never found fault with his peaceful fireside; but on the contrary, always felt a sensation of pity when, as he walked

round Berkeley Square and up Hill Street, on his return from his Chambers, his progress was constantly arrested by fair forms, cloaked, shawled, and unbonnetted, tripping daintily across the pavement into their carriages, about to enjoy the delights of going out to dinner.

“What slaves these people are!” he would say to his mother and sister, when the lengthened evenings enabled them to see their opposite neighbours all entering their carriages about the same hour, in pursuit of the same kind of happiness, “how they bore themselves for the sake of keeping up the acquaintance of people they care nothing about!”

Yet Mark Chetwode was a young man—four and thirty summers were all that he had counted, and he was cheerful enough in disposition to have been able to play the agreeable in society had he chosen to mix much in it, but beyond a few chosen friends with whom he sometimes dined, and who dined in turn with him, he had hardly an acquaintance on more than bowing terms.

Those chosen friends however were well selected—chiefly men older than himself, whose friendship was valuable and creditable at the same time—men, too, who stood by him because they saw his budding abilities, and admired the frank, single-heartedness of his character. His young shoulders bore an old head, and engrossed in his profession by day, he loved the quiet home, which enabled him in the evenings to find a sure retreat whither he could go and enjoy the ever-increasing mass of papers, books and Magazines which it was his hobby to accumulate.

But there is a term to everything, and the fixed habits of many a long year may suddenly be broken up by no agency of our own.

The arrival of a foreign letter one morning, addressed in an unknown hand, to Mrs. Chetwode, troubled the calm waters of her soul as much as any unforeseen event could possibly have done, for she had no foreign correspondents, and with that strange self-denial which

seems to belong to the whole human race, she examined every atom of the exterior of the letter and lost herself in a maze of vain conjectures, when the simple act of breaking the seal would have satisfied her mind as to who was the writer.

Marian Chetwode smiled at her mother's perplexity, and suggested the propriety of waiting the return of the excellent Mark (who had left the house but a few minutes before) that he also might share the delight of a good guess. The remark recalled the old lady to a sense of her absence of mind, and the letter was opened.

The signature, to which she first turned, made her start, for the name of Theresa Dering woke a thousand memories of by-gone days when she who bore it, was Mrs. Chetwode's bosom friend; she read, and every line roused long dormant recollections; she read on, through a long tale of trials borne by her early friend since they had parted, and the past was

so clearly and forcibly drawn, that it seemed as though she had followed her through every scene—tears blinded the old lady's sight and she folded up the letter in silence.

“How strange!” was her first exclamation when her reverie was over, “how strangely things happen in this world, Marian!—That letter is from one whom I have never seen since her wedding day; and now—we are to meet again, both widows! we were bosom friends, but she married a cousin in the army, and, it seems, has followed his fortunes half over India, for after the first three years I lost sight of her altogether; and now,” added Mrs. Chetwode relapsing into her musing vein, “we are to meet again—both widows!—it will be a trying moment, for how changed we both must be!”

Again and again was the letter read, and that day's post would have departed without the answer which was requested to be by return, had not the more collected Marian called

her mother's attention to the concluding paragraph.

“ I am weary of Paris and sigh for the
“ obscurity which a nobody like myself is sure
“ to find in London ; I will await your answer ;
“ therefore, dear friend, let it be by return of
“ post, and should you consent to house me
“ for two nights whilst I seek some moderate
“ lodging, you will really confer a lasting ob-
“ ligation on me, as tempest-tost as I have
“ been about the world at large, it is a very
“ different thing braving the cold welcome of
“ a hastily-found lodging in busy London.”

“ So it is,” remarked Mrs. Chetwode ; “ that
one remark tells how little altered she is.
Theresa Dering was one of the most spoilt and
petted girls possible, and very little fitted to
come in contact with a heartless world. Sit
down, Marian, and write directly and tell her,
my dear child, what a real happiness it will be
for me to receive her ;—tell her how small my
house is, or it should be her home——”

“But her daughters?” interrupted Marian.

“Oh—yes—her daughters—well my child, I conclude she leaves them in Paris, for you see she says nothing of them.”

“Then you overlooked this sentence under the seal, Mamma—‘I shall only bring my girls as far as Dover until I am suited. My eldest is steady enough to conduct a boarding-school so I can trust her with the custody of my merry Theresa, who too nearly resembles her mother in her happy days—wild and thoughtless, but I think better looking than I ever was.’”

“The Theresa Dering I remember was lovely,” said Mrs. Chetwode: “that arrangement will never answer, for I know my friend’s anxious character, if she is like what she was in youth. No, Marian, Dover is too gay for two young girls to be left alone there; and as it is but for two nights, we will find room for them all.”

The very idea of disordering her household a little for the love of her early friend had

something pleasing in it to Mrs. Chetwode; the trifling self-mortification of making her pretty back drawing-room into a bed-room for the young sisters, quite gratified her, and the resolution of asking her precious Mark to vacate his apartment and ascend into loftier regions, was the very triumph of friendship over every other feeling.

As to Mark himself, when he came home that evening, the perturbation of his mother's spirits had by no means subsided; it was natural that the prospect of seeing one from whom she had been so long separated should discompose her, and her son was not surprised to see her overcome when she retraced with him the chequered paths they each had trod since they had lived together as gay and giddy girls, and since they had parted, happy wives. All this did not seem the least strange, but what he marvelled at was the effect the announcement had on himself. He did not like to own, even to himself, that it had slightly

annoyed him; for once he did not see with his mother's eyes, his own took a very different view of the case, and in spite of every secret and inward argument, the conviction that his quiet home was about to be turned inside out, took the most despotic hold of him.

Mrs. Dering was coming to stay in the house ---only for two nights certainly, but still she was coming, and never in this world did a guest only stay the time they said they would. Yes, she was coming, and no two people could be more totally dissimilar than the Theresa Dering expected by Mrs. Chetwode and the Mrs. Dering pictured in the mind's eye of her son. To him she was a gay widow re-entering society, for the ostensible purpose of introducing her daughters, young ladies fashioned and finished in Paris, no doubt "*deux demoiselles à marier*;"—to his mother she was the bereaved parent of two fatherless girls, seeking retirement, and flying naturally to the shelter which

the roof of her earliest friend and companion would afford.

Moreover, Mark Chetwode had rather a dread of young ladies, perhaps from an inward consciousness that he was not a ladies' man; and if the Derings were going to make London their permanent home, in all probability they would make his mother's house their permanent resort, and then, farewell the luxury of silent hours and studious evenings, farewell the tranquil corner of the room where beneath the half-shadowed light of his candle-lamp he pored over his books and papers in uninterrupted enjoyment. All these habits must be laid aside, though only for two days; all these indulgences must be resigned; and still he kept saying to himself, "Only for two days."

"I would just as soon be unsettled for two years as two days," was his remark to his sister, in confidence, "for the feeling of discomfort is equally great for one period as the other—and as for composing small talk for

these young ladies, I would rather be doomed to write a fashionable novel; I think I shall go out of town for the time?"

"Wait Mrs. Dering's answer," was Marian Chetwode's reply; "she may come alone, and then she will not be in your way, for a quiet widow is very different to two giddy—I mean merry—girls."

"True," said Mark Chetwode; and he patiently waited till the post brought the fatal missive, fully believing that Mrs. Dering would never be so unconscionable as to accept his mother's hospitable offer.

But he was mistaken; she did, and that with an alacrity and gratitude which convinced her warm-hearted old friend that she would never have had a happy moment had she left her two girls at Dover. And so they were all coming; the two Theresas, senior and junior, and the steady Georgina, who was fit to conduct a boarding school! and this was not all: there was a lady's-maid who would

be thankful for any old sofa, or chair-bed, or even an arm-chair "just for the two nights," and lastly there was "a perfect treasure" in the shape of Victor, once valet, since courier, and then confidential servant to the unprotected trio.

For him a corner was solicited, humbly and imploringly ; he was such an excellent creature, so useful, so trustworthy, and so attached that Mrs. Dering could not resolve to expose him to the contamination of poor, degraded London, unless it were absolutely impossible for her dear friend to receive him ; and Mrs. Chetwode in the warmth of her heart had a hard battle in her own mind what to say !

At any other season, ready acquiescence would most probatly have been her reply, but it happened just at that time that the public tranquillity had been greatly disturbed by the awful circumstance of Lord William Russell's death. How much this dreadful murder preyed on every mind, and how much longer than

the usual nine days the excitement of horror lasted, must still be fresh in every recollection. None can have forgotten the sensation of terror and insecurity which crept into every bosom when the fearful deed was noised abroad, and there are many who must still remember that despite every effort to summon up one's feelings of Christian charity towards all men, a prejudice did most certainly arise in several breasts in that season against foreigners in general, and Swiss valets in particular.

"It may be very foolish and very wrong of me, Mark," said the old lady, at the close of the inward warfare, "but I cannot---argue with myself as I will-- I cannot house this man."

"I think it neither foolish nor wrong, my dear mother," was Mr. Chetwode's mild and guarded reply; "for it seems to me that your friend exacts a little too much."

"Not at all! you mistake me; it would really make me happy to put myself to even

more inconvenience for Theresa's comfort, but after Courvoisier---no, Mark, I cannot house the man, for I should not sleep a wink for thinking of that frightful murder; and yet, how to tell her without either alarming her or hurting her feelings, I do not know."

Victor, it appeared, had attended the late Captain Dering in his last moments, and judging by what she should herself feel under the same circumstances, Mrs. Chetwode feared that any slight to so faithful a servant, might wound the sensitive heart of her bereaved friend.

"And yet I declare to you, Mark, I am weak enough to be absolutely uncomfortable at the idea of having him here."

"Think no more of it, mother," was her son's off-hand and smiling answer; "you shall run no risk of sleepless nights; the man shall have a bed in the immediate neighbourhood, from whence he can be at Mrs. Dering's service at any hour; and should any opposition take place, which is very unlikely, the blame

shall be mine, and the heartlessness of the act mine also---depend upon it our guest will have the good taste to be quite satisfied with the arrangement if we simply tell her we have not room for him, therefore I would say nothing about Courvoisier if I were you."

To this plan Mrs. Chetwode reluctantly agreed; and in due course of time the expected guests arrived.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN the cream-coloured chariot had set down the “three inside” which it had picked up at the coach office—when the hackney coach had disburdened itself of the lady’s maid, the “perfect treasure,” and all the luggage—when in fact the half-dreaded meeting was over, and Mrs. Chetwode found herself alone, after having shown Mrs. Dering and her daughters the rooms prepared for them, she began to wonder at the calmness with which she had gone

through the interview, and the wonderful self-command exhibited by her friend, who, in fact, had betrayed no sort of emotion beyond a degree of joy, which was not exuberant enough to disorder a hair of her head, or a fold of the veil so delicately tied under her chin. The first embrace over, she had made way for her daughters, and thus diverted Mrs. Chetwode's attention from herself, but a glance had been sufficient to show the latter that the melancholy widow she had expected to see was a graceful, carefully-dressed woman, not young-looking certainly, but in a state of admirable preservation.

Mrs. Dering had been a belle, and when she descended to the drawing-room dressed for dinner, an hour after their arrival, she had all the remains of a pretty woman; but the beautiful bride from whom Mrs. Chetwode had parted at the church door, had not the sharpness of feature, the restless eye, and the slightly roseate-tinged nose which marked the mother of the *deux demoiselles à marier*."

Mr. Chetwode received them remarkably well, but he kept aloof—they were all three so exactly what he had pictured to himself that he exchanged a smile with his sister, as he offered his arm to his mother's broken-hearted friend.

The charm of her manners was not lost upon him; the vivacity of her conversation amused him, and before dinner was over, he had decided in his mind that though the loss of her husband and her life-time of trouble and trial had not made the indelible impression on her which had roused the tenderness of his mother's pitying heart, still she was a very agreeable woman, with a daughter who owned the loveliest countenance he had ever beheld.

Georgy and Theresa Dering were not forward, flippant, or remarkable young ladies in any way, unless the personal beauty of the latter be excepted. They both talked fluently with the people whom they had never seen before, and seemed as much at home that first evening, as if they had lived a year in the

house. The nervousness of Marian Chetwode wore off as the hours glided on, and her brother gradually thawed, but Mrs. Chetwode was so taken up by two objects in the room, that she had not a syllable to offer in return for Mrs. Dering's volubility.

The first object was young Theresa, who sat before her, the living image of her early friend when last she remembered her, twenty years since ! Yet there was a stiffness in the daughter's beauty which had never belonged to Mrs. Dering, and the tone of her voice had the instantaneous effect of marring the loveliness of the lips from whence issued the sounds.

The second object was Victor the "perfect treasure." A gaunt, tall man, with florid cheeks, as if the colour were stained on the cheek bones by some permanent dye, long twisted moustaches, a very handsome head altogether, but a pair of eyes so glittering, so fiery, and so black, that they irresistably attracted the attention of Mrs Chetwode, and

caused her to feel an inward thankfulness that he was not to sleep in the house !

His officiousness was beyond everything—he put the old footman completely out of breath, and Jenner, the butler, stood and looked at him with amazement, for he took all the work out of their hands.

“An invaluable man,” said Mrs. Dering, as they went upstairs after dinner, “we should be lost without him; otherwise I never could have ventured to ask you to find a corner for him under your hospitable roof.”

This was the moment seized by Mrs. Chetwode for explaining to her friend that no such corner had been found. In her anxiety to word her excuses so as to give no offence, she accidentally allowed the name of Courvoisier to escape her, and Mrs. Dering and her daughter went off into fits of laughter; in vain Marian looked a thousand reproofs at her mother—every succeeding word only made the matter worse, and the merriment was only

checked by the apparition of the very man himself who, with a tray of coffee cups, stood mute at their elbows, having noiselessly entered the room with Jenner, and possibly overheard every word that had been said!

“I doubt if he heard or understood,” whispered Mrs. Dering, “but I will explain it to him myself—only allow me to speak a few words to him alone.”

So Victor was told there was no room for him, and with a smile on his lip and disbelief in his eye, he bowed to the arrangement with an air which convinced Mrs. Dering he had heard the name of his unfortunate com-patriot, and made his own conclusions.

That first evening was entirely taken up by Mrs. Dering in detailing the events of the last year or two, and impressing on Mrs. Chetwode that no mother had ever slaved more for the advantage of two daughters than she had done for hers.

“With my small means,” was the phrase for ever in her mouth—

“With my small means,” she ran on, “it has been most difficult to make all ends meet, and give my girls good masters, particularly moving about so much as we have done; therefore, repugnant as gay society was to my feelings, I sacrificed myself for their sakes and gave them a winter in Paris, to cultivate Georgy’s singing and Theresa’s music—but,” she added in a lower tone, “Theresa will never be a musician—she is too timid—and too volatile—but you should see her dance!” and Mrs. Dering turned up her eyes. “Now Georgy has profited very fairly—you must hear her sing, my dear friend, only I tell you in the strictest confidence that the two girls are not to be compared!—equally dear of course, but I mean to say that one is delf, and the other is china!”

Mrs. Chetwode looked at “delf” and smiled; certainly she was not pretty, and she was too self-possessed for one so young, but they were

both so well dressed and "set up" that the great difference between them was not visible to a casual observer. As for "China," there she sat, laughing and talking, her sentences merrily rolling one over the other, and her careless spirit seeming to take no heed of the opinions of those around her. She was charmed at being in London, and in raptures at the idea of seeing a play.

"And the opera—I long to go to the opera—I hope I shall go once!—do you ever go?" said she, addressing Miss Chetwode.

"The season is but beginning," answered Marian, evading a direct reply, "so you will have many opportunities I daresay."

"But Mamma says it is so expensive," began Georgy.

"Yes," cried Mrs. Dering, who had the faculty of being able to hear all that was said by others, although holding a conversation herself at the same time—"yes, we must not

even think of those little extravagances, so sit down my Georgy, and let Mrs. Chetwode hear you sing."

The good grace with which Georgy unhesitatingly complied, made her hostess resolve that an opera box should be placed at their disposal for any night they pleased, and when the singer's beautiful and tutored voice had gone through a succession of songs, the old lady was more and more pleased to think she could confer a great happiness on girls so well able to appreciate it, and unable to procure it for themselves.

So sped the first evening. As if by general consent, the mother, son, and daughter forbore making any remarks on their guests that night, but parted in a silence which was only broken by one observation from Mr. Chetwode, and that was,

"I think, mother, Mrs. Dering's spirits must be less depressed than you expected?"

To which no reply beyond a reluctant smile

was given. The truth was, that in her heart Mrs. Chetwode was disappointed; she had looked for grief where all was gaiety, and there was also something uncomfortable in even the conviction that her friend must have devoted an infinite deal of time to her personal charms, to have kept them in such preservation.

The old lady looked at herself in the glass, and compared her grey looks with the smooth unsilvered bands of the widow's glossy hair—she glanced with a dissatisfied eye at the cap which made her look older than she really was, and saw still before her the pretty black lace head-dress which artfully concealed in her friend any mischief caused by the thief of good looks, old Time; and yet they had been friends together in early youth, and the disparity of age between them was not very great.

It was with such thoughts as these that sleep visited Mrs. Chetwode's eyelids, and whilst heaviness still sealed them the next morning, strange though melodious sounds startled her,

and the resounding tones of the piano in the drawing-room beneath, with an accompaniment of scales, roulades, trills, and shakes, fairly hunted her out of bed.

One does not like to be roused early in the morning by unusual sounds; it makes one nervous for the rest of the day, and Mrs. Chetwode's piano being a very fine one, and the fingers, that touched, and the voice that accompanied, both very powerful, her equanimity was considerably disturbed by the noise, and she felt almost annoyed, when on meeting at breakfast, Georgy Dering hoped in the most placid of voices, that her "practising" had not disturbed her.

She was too kind to say it had startled her from sleep, and given her a headache, so she merely praised the young lady for being an early riser.

"Oh, I was not up—that is, not dressed," exclaimed Georgy; "but Theresa would have

her hair done first this morning, and I always practise whilst she monopolises."

"I told you it was too early," interrupted her beautiful sister, who had caught three pair of eyes directed towards her light ringlets and felt a little confused at the scrutiny.

"But my girls are like larks, up with the sun," chimed in Mrs. Dering; "and I thought they never would leave me last night, they were so overjoyed at being in their own country again, and with such kind friends."

If Mr. Chetwode's lips could have mutinied and uttered sounds against his will, the word "Humbug" would undoubtedly have escaped them, but he contented himself with screwing them up, and fixing his eyes on his plate; he began to think Mrs. Dering rather artificial, but his mother was evidently trying to make herself so happy in her society, that he smothered the idea at its birth.

It is at the close of a London breakfast that

plans for the day are generally made by the gay and the busy. Mrs. Dering proposed starting immediately in search of lodgings, whilst her daughters entreated that the morning might be devoted to seeing sights. An unanswerable argument then arose on the part of their mother, showing them that it was impossible to go to exhibitions without an escort, whereupon Mr. Chetwode almost shuddered, for he felt like a fly at the very edge of a spider's web; but the daughters seemed dutiful and the lodging-hunt was decided on with no opposition save from Mrs. Chetwode, who wished them to make use of her carriage.

"No, my dear friend," said Mrs. Dering; "it is very kind of you, but I am too prudent to be tempted: looking for lodgings in a carriage would make them mount up to a sum far beyond my small means, so we will just take Victor, and do the best we can for ourselves."

The quartett departed, and the quiet house in Hill-street resumed its character. Hour

after hour passed away, and luncheon was kept on the table till it was time to lay the cloth for dinner, but still they returned not. Six o'clock struck, and Mrs. Chetwode made a sacrifice on the altar of friendship; she victimised her excellent Mark, who took no luncheon, and ordered the dinner to be served at half past seven instead of half past six.

By seven the absentees had returned; but instead of appearing in their fagged and jaded state, they went straight to their rooms and only presented themselves when dinner was announced.

“My dear friend, I am ashamed to look you in the face,” were Mrs. Dering’s first words; “you will wish me and mine at the bottom of the Red Sea.”

“Not at all—” began Mrs. Chetwode.

“Nay, but hear me,” continued her friend. “Picture to yourself my position: we have been up and down almost every street in the neighbourhood, for I wished to be as near you

as possible, and not a lodging have I found. The difficulty is beyond everything: the rents are exorbitant—nothing to be had under five guineas a week—and yet with my small means I assure you I am far from particular. One I saw in South Audley-street that I really thought would do, but these girls of mine found an objection.”

“There was a brass-plate on the door,” said Georgy.

“Yes,” added Theresa; “and ones’ friends might dislike that, even if we put up with it ourselves; besides, it was a dentist’s, and Mr. Sydenham said we should hear the shrieks and groans of the wounded all day.”

“We met an old acquaintance in the course of our wanderings,” said Mrs. Dering, addressing both host and hostess alternately; “one whom we have not seen for several months—not since we spent many peaceful, happy evenings together in the little society we fre-

quented at Baden—one too for whom I feel quite like a mother, for he is the only child of my husband's dearest friend, Colonel Sydenham. It was a painful pleasure seeing Edward Sydenham again, for I prize every link that once belonged to my chain of happiness."

That chord struck home, and Mrs. Chetwode regretted that her friend had not asked Mr. Sydenham to spend the evening with them.

"If it would have been agreeable to you, Theresa, you might have been sure how gladly I should receive any one you esteemed."

"I told him where we were: I said we should be here till to-morrow," said Mrs. Dering; "and that is the reason I was so late. I was positively ashamed to come back to you without having succeeded in finding lodgings."

"Not a word on that score," was the hospitable rejoinder. "Remember, my dear Theresa, that if you hurry away I shall think you are not comfortable; so if you should still

be unsuccessful to-morrow, the doors will not be closed against you."

The eyes of Mark Chetwode and his sister met, and laughter sparkled in each pair. Few as had been the hours they had spent in Mrs. Dering's society, the time had sufficed for them to fathom her depth in a measure; not perhaps to its full extent, for they little dreamt that she, who so piteously detailed with countless sighs the fatigues of lodging-hunting, had entered but one that day, and that, the dentist's. The rest of their time had been spent in shops, every variety of which had been ransacked in search of bargains wherewith to dazzle the eyes of those acquaintances who knew they had just arrived from Paris, and believed every article they wore to be purely Parisian.

That night, when Mrs. Dering left her daughters to their slumbers, a maternal caution was breathed into the drowsy ear of Theresa.

"Now remember what I say, Theresa: we

have every chance of remaining in this house for some days; if in the course of that time Mr. Sydenham should be invited to spend an evening, remember what I say—*no flirting*. I have my reasons.”

CHAPTER III.

THOUGH the ear of Theresa might be drowsy, it was not so dull that the maternal admonition failed in its effect—on the contrary it roused her from the immediate approach of sleep, and set her wondering why it had been uttered.

“Mamma generally tells me not to flirt with Edward Sydenham when some eligible is in the way “said she to Georgina—“but why on earth should she caution me in *this* house?”

“There is Mr. Chetwode.”

“As much an old bachelor as his sister is an old maid!”

“Well, then, perhaps she thinks Mrs. Chetwode might be scandalized.”

Theresa was going to say—“Who cares if she is?” when the recollection of the lodging they had seen in the morning with the obnoxious brass plate on the door checked the words. Both those young sisters had been too long their mother’s constant companions not to have imbibed all her tenets, and learnt most of her wiles. They were quite aware that those whose aim it was to mix in society must keep up a good appearance at any cost, for the world has a contempt for poverty, and despises even the semblance of it—consequently it was their best policy to please Mrs. Chetwode, and see how long she would continue to make them welcome as her guests—for to make acquaintance with a London world from a house in Hill-street was more likely to ensure an entrance into good society, than if a dingy lodging in a noisy street were their home.

And yet, though Mrs. Dering was even more alive than her daughters to this fact, she wasted not a moment over the breakfast table the next morning, but rose with loudly expressed hopes that by thus beginning the day earlier they might be more successful in finding apartments to suit them.

Mrs. Chetwode arrested her nimble steps, as soon as her plans were divulged, by laying her hand on her arm—she had a few words to say before they started on their fatiguing search—she was sure the dear girls would like to go to the Opera, and they ought not to be fagged when such an excitement was in prospect.

“So stay at home till the afternoon, and then take the carriage to Eber’s—choose any box you like without asking any questions, and let the ticket be sent to me.”

Great were the raptures, and loud the expressions of delight, when Mrs. Dering suddenly recollected it was Thursday—the Opera

would be very late, and they would have different acts of several operas instead of one good one—moreover it was a bad night for seeing Royalty and celebrities, and Mrs. Chetwode saw by the countenances of the trio before her that their enthusiasm had suddenly cooled when they recollected the same thing.

“Then take it for Saturday,” said she, after a momentary pause; “Saturday is assuredly the best night.”

“How kind! how very kind!” cried the three voices; “but is it the same to Mr. Chetwode?”

The excellent Mark had that instant entered for his gloves preparatory to departing for the Temple, and the amiable appeal to him was very cavalierly treated. He begged they would never consult his convenience on any subject of that kind. If he were required, his services as their escort were available, but if they had any other, he confessed he was not a party-going man.

“ But going quietly to the Opera—sitting still in a box—chaperoning your sister—”

“ The box is yours Theresa,” interrupted Mrs. Chetwode, with more decision than she usually displayed; “ engage it for Saturday, and make your own party. If Mark is wanted, he is to be found here even at the eleventh hour.”

Innumerable were the rings at the street-door bell that morning—countless the people who wished to see Mrs. Dering “ on business,” some of whom had ominous *cartons* with them: but as the dining-room was appropriated to their reception, and the door firmly closed, no one had a right to say that the *cartons* had aught to do with the object of their visit.

Whilst the room was still full of these individuals “ on business,” a knock resounded through the hall, and a gentleman, announced as Mr. Sydenham, was ushered into the drawing room where Mrs. Chetwode had to entertain him until her friend was at liberty, a pe-

riod nearly approaching half an hour. This, to one whose habits of retirement made the presence of a total stranger almost painful, would in any other case have been a most oppressive infliction, but as it happened, the visitor ingratiated himself so immediately with the old lady, that when Mrs. Dering appeared, uttering a profusion of apologies, they were smilingly accepted.

“ Well ! if I were eighteen,” exclaimed Mrs. Chetwode, on Mr. Sydenham’s departure and after he had promised to join them at tea that evening, “ if I were eighteen, I am afraid my heart would require a very strong lock and key if Mr. Sydenham were often in its neighbourhood ! ”

“ You think him goodlooking then ? ”

“ Yes—and something more—he is irresistably pleasing.”

“ Ah, yes !—of that we can judge—but as to his good looks, we are so accustomed to his features that I am sure if you asked either of

the girls whether they thought him plain or handsome, they would hesitate as to what to answer !”

When Mr. Chetwode came home that evening, he happened to be rather out of sorts—something had gone wrong in the course of the day and he returned with a headache, therefore instead of going straight up to his own room, he sought the quiet society of his sister, and listened, over a cup of tea, to the events of the day. The theme of the Dering proceedings was pleasing to his ear, for it gave him an excuse for indulging in slight invectives, and giving vent to a little of the bitterness which was souring his temper that evening.

“ Upon my honour,” was his exclamation, “ this is the very coolest woman I ever met in my life ! Did I not tell you, Marian, I had a presentiment that, Mrs. Dering once in the house, my mother was in for it ?—and, not content with turning us out of our rooms and filling them for some unknown period, she

must even make her friends ours, and leave our good, dear, shy mother to entertain *her* visitors !”

“ But really, as it happened, Mamma got on wonderfully with Mr. Sydenham and liked him.”

“ Yes—as it happened ! but it might have been just the reverse and she might have been bored to death !—What are they going to do this evening ?”

“ Mamma invited Mr. Sydenham to tea.”

“ And what are the plans for the future ?”

“ I do not know—they were to take the Opera box for Saturday instead of to-night——”

“ And in consequence, remain here till Monday !” interrupted Mr. Chetwode.

“ Oh no ! the lodging hunt was to continue this afternoon !”

“ And it will be unsuccessful again !” said Mr. Chetwode, rising impatiently—“ upon my life Marian I do not believe Mrs. Dering means to go into lodgings at all !—I have a horrible

feeling that she does not even look for them!— I give you my word,” he added almost petulantly as he opened the door to leave the room —“ if I had such a headache as this every day, that individual’s ceaseless tongue would drive downright me mad!”

The Derings were in high spirits when they sat down to dinner;—the widow had met a great number of old friends whom she had known abroad, and talked more than ever, but not a word on the subject of lodgings until, in answer to a question from Mr. Chetwode, she confessed that as his dear mother had so hospitably begged them not to go before the following Monday (?) she had postponed the fatigue until the following day;—Georgy was quite animated at having met a musical man, Mr. Keating, and talked in raptures of his singing—

“ He is always my second—you cannot think what a bass he has, and such taste too, having lived quite amongst professionals all his life—he

is one of the best amateurs we know, is he not, Mamma?"

Mrs. Dering assented, but added in a careless kind of way that she thought Mr. Champney's nearly as good.

"Ah! I forgot him," continued Georgy, turning to Mrs. Chetwode, "we met him too to-day while we were listening to the choremusic; he has more taste than voice though, and cannot take a part at sight as Mr. Keating can. You are fond of music, dear Mrs. Chetwode?"

Yes—Mrs. Chetwode liked Georgy's singing, she said with a smile, if that was what she meant—but it appeared it was not;—Georgy had other motives for asking the question—she had told the two musical men where she was staying, and it was just possible that with their foreign habits and manners, they might consider the information synonymous to an invitation to pay an evening visit instead of a morning one, and "drop in;"

would Mrs. Chetwode be very angry if they did?

No—the old lady could hardly reply otherwise—but certainly the prospect of three strangers to tea, was rather formidable—she contented herself however with saying, she only wished to see Georgy and Theresa happy, and as she uttered the words, both Mr. Chetwode and Marian remarked, that the beautiful eyes of the latter glanced brightly for a moment at the speaker and a flush crossed her cheek; another moment, and she had relapsed into the rather subdued state in which she had been during dinner.

The look and the flush roused Mr. Chetwode into observation—he began to think her interesting as well as beautiful, for there was something about her this day that had attracted his attention, and he wondered why the two sisters had changed characters—why the placid “delf,” was so talkative, and the brilliant “china,” so silent;—Mrs Dering he cordially disliked, and Georgy was so steeped in

worldliness that she only served as an object of curiosity, but there was a nameless fascination about Theresa, which her ever-varying temper seemed only to heighten, and Mr. Chetwode felt for the first time in his life, that one of a class, which he had hitherto looked upon as being made of ringlets and ribbons, had actually power to chain his thoughts, and interest him in spite of himself.

At this moment, Victor entered the room; he had now become so much at home that he left the two grave old men servants of the house very little to do; in his hand was one of Ollivier's neat, brown-paper parcels, of a gigantic size, and Mrs. Chetwode made some casual remark about "purchases."

"Oh, no," exclaimed Georgy, "only new music to try—such lovely duets and trios! I am sure you will admire them."

"You do not mean to say you will get through all that huge parcel to-night?" said Mr. Chetwode.

“ We shall try them all over,” was Georgy’s answer, “ and only practise those that we like well enough to keep.”

Mr Chetwode said no more, but he thought within himself that if hospitality demanded that the family of the house should sit up till the guests of their visitors had departed, they would not be in bed before the small hours of the morning.

The evening advanced and a little knock at the door announced an arrival. Mr. Champneys was ushered up and Victor followed with a roll of music. A few minutes more and a cab drove up ;—it was Mr. Keating followed by a portfolio, very full indeed ; another cab drove up and Mr. Sydenham entered the room.

The party had now assembled and conversation became general ;—Mr. Keating and Mr. Champneys stood by Georgy, who kept twisting round on the music stool at the piano till interrupted by her mother, who told her she was

setting everybody's teeth on edge : Mr. Sydenham was hemmed into a corner by Mrs. Dering, and Theresa sat close to Miss Chetwode, learning the art of crochet.

The eyes of Mark Chetwode were singularly beyond control that evening—they kept wandering in that direction incessantly, until, happening once to turn towards Mrs. Dering, he saw that her volubility was falling on a heedless ear and that her apparent listener was absorbed in the identical contemplation in which he had been himself, till that moment, engaged.

Till then, Mr. Chetwode had hardly vouchsafed a single glance at his visiter, but now, his attention was arrested in spite of himself. Edward Sydenham was at this period in the prime of manhood ; his slight but athletic figure was much above the middling height, and the way in which he carried his head, always thrown rather backwards, made him look taller even than he was.

His features were not regular and his face was not handsome, but, as Mrs. Chetwode had remarked, it certainly was irresistibly pleasing. It was a pale countenance and the expression was melancholy;—the lines round the mouth were marked, but placid, and the deep set eyes aided the general aspect;—His hair grew so much off his forehead that it gave a few years of age to his appearance, but at eight and twenty that was hardly an objection and Mr. Chetwode, with a feeling of annoyance which he could neither command nor conceal from himself, turned abruptly away, and for the first time in his life, voluntarily seated himself by a young lady, and began to play the agreeable, the young lady being no other than Theresa Dering, his beautiful guest.

By their side sat Marian Chetwode, a silent observer of all that was going on; nothing was lost on her, for the day was gone by when attentions from others might have prevented her

taking note of what was passing around her ; the forced gaiety of Mrs. Dering, the ceaseless songs of Georgy, the impatience of Mr. Sydenham, and the abstracted silence of Theresa, all convinced her that some game was being played, the mystery of which time would unravel.

All this however was not so surprising to her as the sudden alteration in her brother's manner to the individuals whom, a few hours before, he had been abusing. He was bending down to Theresa to catch every half articulated syllable—he was blind to the looks darted across the room from mother to daughter, and blind to the carelessness with which Theresa listened to every word he uttered, making him repeat almost everything twice.

At last the divided groups formed into one, and the party were about to break up when the Opera came on the tapis ; Mrs. Dering whispered to Mrs. Chetwode and Mrs Chetwode whispered back again—some slight remon-

strances were passing between them, betrayed by the old lady herself, exclaiming aloud,

“I assure you Mark is quite indifferent to everything of the kind—he is only happy to be your escort when you require one, but this evening it appears to me that you have your number complete.”

“No, indeed, my dear friend—Mr. Chetwode *must* be one of us,” was Mrs. Dering’s reply; and then she stopped abruptly, for it was awkward, with Mr. Sydenham’s eyes fastened on her, to say which of the four gentlemen it was whom she wished to exclude. It was Theresa who came to the rescue—she had been all attention to the discussion and nervously awaiting its termination, and now with a voice strangely tremulous for *her*, she said,

“Mr. Chetwode hates going out in the evening, Mamma, but he has offered to sacrifice himself on this occasion”—

“And Mr. Sydenham,” asked Mrs. Chetwode, addressing Mrs. Dering, but evidently

appealing to himself, "what are his engagements?"

The tone was piqued, and the voice unlike itself, which so hastily answered, "Mrs. Dering knows she can always command *my* services!"

Even supposing this were the case, it was very evident, from the expression of the widow's generally tutored face, that she would have been much better pleased not to have had them in her power for this particular evening, but she was too politic to let Mr. Chetwode think she wished him to be alone in his glory; therefore it was agreed that Mr. Sydenham should dine in Hill Street, on Saturday, and accompany the Derings to the opera.

From that moment Theresa's spirits rose again. She became herself to all but one—she chattered to Mrs. Chetwode, and rallied her misanthropical son on having at last drawn him out of his den—she quizzed Mr. Keating's style of singing and Mr. Champney's voice, which she said he was quite accustomed to—

in short the mist that had damped her glee was completely dispelled to all *save one*—to him there was the averted face and lowered eyelid—the short reply and measured tone—and when at last, in an unguarded moment, Mrs. Dering suffered her prisoner to escape from the corner in which she had held him the whole evening, it seemed as though his patience were fairly wearied out, and hastily gaining the side of her daughter, he breathed into her ear, unheard by all save Marian Chetwode, the words, “Oh! Theresa, why are you so changed?”

CHAPTER IV.

DAY after day, till days became weeks, did the Dering family continue the guests of the hospitable and enduring Chetwodes.—Evening after evening were they keeping out the astonished horses and keeping up the indignant household, and still, strange to say, all London contained not a lodging fit for the occupation of one who had followed her husband's steps through many a weary march in distant lands and miserable climates.

And now, Mrs. Chetwode's invitations grew

more cordial instead of waxing fainter—they were renewed too more constantly, and Mrs. Dering's distress at being obliged to accept them became less and less apparent. Mark Chetwode was an altered being also ; instead of abusing the wily widow, he was silent on the theme of her insatiability, and instead of frowning or trembling when amusements were named, he was eternally bringing home tickets for the Opera or the Theatres, and only asked as his reward that he should be allowed to make one of their party in the private boxes which he presented to them.

Marian only stood aloof, and to them, on their part, she was a nonentity whom they almost entirely overlooked. Mrs. Chetwode began to like the coaxing Georgina, and the beautiful giddy Theresa she delighted in more and more every day, and dreaded when the time should come that she should miss her merry voice and heedless chattering.

At last the moment arrived when Mrs.

Dering began to utter faint sounds indicative of departure; the house with the brass plate had never been let, and she began to think no other would do for her so well, for thanks to Mrs. Chetwode, they had now formed a nice little circle around them, and people who had sought their society in Hill Street would hardly cut them because they had chosen to move into North Audley Street.

No sooner, however, were these symptomatic tones uttered, than opposition was offered to the plan; and whose voice was it which so earnestly assured Mrs. Dering that she could not be allowed to go? No other than Mark Chetwode's! He it was, who, in vehemently objecting to the lodgings, protested to the widow that in pressing her to remain he was only echoing his mother's sentiments and forwarding her wishes.

"You have just stayed long enough to make her feel your departure a melancholy blank," were his words, "she will miss her gossip with

you all about old times, and she will miss Georgy's delightful singing—she will feel herself quite lost and lonely in short; and therefore we cannot hear of your leaving us!"

There was not a word of Theresa in his entreaties and regrets!

"But," said Mrs. Dering, laughing, "you know we cannot live here for ever. As it is, we have been here three weeks, and we came for two nights."

Marian Chetwode looked up hastily at her brother as the last few words were pronounced, expecting to meet an answering glance, remembering so well as she did how much he had dwelt, when the Dering's first arrived, on their being "only two nights" in the house; to her surprise, however, he almost studiously avoided encountering her eyes; but went on trying to persuade Mrs. Dering to alter her determination.

But the widow was too wary; she had achieved great things in awaking so much in-

terest in one of whom she had, the first few days, no hope at all; and now that the spark had caught, she meant it to creep on slowly and surely, without running the risk of extinguishing it, by prematurely fanning it into a flame.

Quietly, therefore, but firmly she pursued her purpose, and even, at last, found courage to name the day of departure.

"At all events," said Mark Chetwode to Theresa, when the fatal announcement was made, and his voice was lower than usual as he spoke, "at all events you will be near—it might be worse."

"Yes—we might be leaving town altogether," was the reply.

"How did you know what I meant?" he asked.

"I only expressed what I meant myself," laughed Theresa.

The laugh destroyed the effect of her former sentence, and the countenance of Mark Chet-

wode fell. Theresa was beyond his comprehension; for one moment he flattered himself there was some slight understanding between them, and the next her levity destroyed every hope that she looked upon him as otherwise than the slowest of her admirers!

And, indeed, what was he, he often asked himself—what *was* he compared to the rest?—Was he fitted to enter the lists with Edward Sydenham for instance, and yet even his devotion met nothing but coldness.

Mark Chetwode was generally silent and reserved, and he was afraid of women; consequently when Theresa ventured to laugh at him, instead of being annoyed, he felt depressed, and sometimes almost came to the conclusion that Mrs. Dering's beautiful "china" was very nearly as hard and insensible as the material to which her mother compared her.

Meanwhile the hours sped faster and faster, and the last Saturday arrived; they were going to the Opera in a box engaged by Mr.

Chetwode—it was only to contain four—and when Theresa heard it she coloured in a very unaccountable manner—a sentence trembled on her lips, and at last, in spite of a fixed glance from her mother, more fearful than many words, she exclaimed—

“What! we three ladies and only one gentleman to the Opera?—really, Mamma, it is too much to impose on Mr. Chetwode; I wish you would take a *cavalier* in my place, and let me spend this last evening with Mrs. Chetwode.”

“Mark would be terribly disappointed if you did,” interposed the old lady herself, “do not think of such a thing, Theresa; I am sure he is too happy to escort the whole trio, so why make difficulties?”

Mark had entered the room as the last words were spoken, and would have echoed them had not Georgy suddenly volunteered a remark.

“What does it signify having only one gentleman!” were her words, “though there are only four tickets that does not make the box

any smaller, and we shall be sure to see some one to find the carriage for us in the course of the evening."

Mr. Chetwode, had it been in his nature, could have hated Georgy for this objectionable sentence, but she was Theresa's sister; he could have felt annoyed and indignant at the bad taste and ungraciousness which thus openly showed he was being made a convenience of, but she stood by Theresa's side and her affinity made her sacred—so he left the room in silence and tried to forget the disagreeable impression her interruption had made upon him.

For the last time Mrs. Dering departed to engage the lodgings in North Audley Street, and she was accompanied by Georgina.

"May I leave my Theresa with you?" said she to her old friend in the softest of whispers, "she is so showy, and will insist on being such a *dandizette* that when I am going to strike a bargain I always leave her at home."

Mrs. Chetwode was too happy to secure her

favourite thus easily for a long afternoon; and Mark, whose attendance at the Temple Chambers had been of late singularly like angels' visits, sat and enjoyed the time with an enjoyment all the keener because he was about to be deprived of it.

At last he was called away; and then, suddenly seating herself on a footstool by Mrs. Chetwode's side, the beautiful Theresa exclaimed, "I am going to say something that you must not think strange, but, dear Mrs. Chetwode, I do so often wonder that your son has never married!"

The old lady paused for a reply, and hesitated ere she gave it. The exclamation had been so abruptly uttered that it quite startled her, and the use of the past tense, "*has never married*," awoke in her breast a curious, uncomfortable feeling connected with her dear Mark's age, which tinged her words with sharpness as she answered

"You speak as if he were ninety-nine, my

dear, or as if he had lost opportunities—he has plenty of time before him, I think, and I trust I may live to see him happy yet, if his present state does not come up to your ideas of felicity.”

“Oh! I never meant anything of that kind,” cried Theresa:” I only wondered at his being single, because he is so good, so excellent, and so clever.”

“He is all that,” interrupted Mrs. Chetwode.

“And cheerfully inclined too,” continued Theresa, “and enjoys gaieties just as much as Georgy and I do, I really believe, though he pretended when we first came that he was not a party-going man!”

“Yes; he likes amusements and society now,” said his proud mother; “but he certainly did not once.”

“No; but it shows he has it in him,” rattled on Theresa; “and this made me often wonder that, considering, dear Mrs. Chetwode, that you are quiet and retiring, and Marian not much of

a companion as far as liveliness goes, your good, excellent Mark never married—I mean is not married; perhaps he thinks you might not like him to have a wife.”

“My dear, how can you say that?” exclaimed Mrs. Chetwode, rather annoyed. “What made you think such a thing of me?—I who worship my son. Do you mean to insinuate——”

“Dearest of madames,” laughed her young companion, playfully covering the irate lips with her hand, “do not fly into a passion: I never meant to insinuate anything at all; only you know mothers never like their sons marrying, though they may try and put a good face upon it; surely you know the old proverb, and proverbs are always true:—

‘My daughter’s my daughter all the days of her life,
But my son’s not my son when he takes him a wife.’”

“You do not know my son, nor me either,” said Mrs. Chetwode gravely, “if you think we should acknowledge that proverb to have a

grain of truth in it: when Mark marries, his wife will be but another child to me; we have lived a life of united interests, and he will never choose one who would dissolve the sacred tie of mother and son."

When Mrs. Dering and Georgy came home they were worn out with fatigue as usual, and envied, in exhausted voices, the calm quietude of Mrs. Chetwode and Marian, the coolness of Mark, and the fresh liveliness of Theresa, who was enjoying the amusement of making him guess, if he could, the subject which had had power to put his gentle mother into a passion.

But in the depths of Mrs. Dering's eyes, beneath the outward langour, there lurked a sparkle of satisfaction which told her experienced daughter, though it might have been imperceptible to others, that she had gained some victory or made some extraordinary bargain, and in a few minutes the murder was out, for to the consternation of two of her listeners, and

the real regret of a third, Mrs. Dering speedily divulged her doings of that afternoon.

She had gone out with the intention of taking the lodgings—she had even made up her mind to give the sum asked for them, being really ashamed of any longer encroaching on her dear friend's hospitality, when somehow or other Georgy reminded her that they wanted white gloves for the evening, and they found themselves in Bond-street instead of North Audley-street, and in Redmayne's instead of the dentist's

“*Dieu dispose*, as of course you are aware my dear friend,” she continued with increasing volubility, “for who should be sitting in Redmayne's but Major and Mrs. Keating, the parents of Georgy's singing man; kind, good, old poople making their great annual purchase of things which last them in the country from one year's end to the other. We were delighted to meet again, for it is years since we parted, under the most trying circumstances—in India

dear friend — you know what I mean. Mrs. Keating has quite an affection for me I really believe, ever since I was left so desolate; and she knows all my struggles and privations too, and my small means, for I should not be justified in making them a secret; so, in short, she and the major — good old man — made me the kindest and most timely of offers. They live in Dorsetshire, not far from Dorchester, a delightful part of the world, and they proposed that instead of incurring the sad expense of these lodgings, I should spend the remainder of the spring and summer with them, and thus give them the cheerfulness of my girls' society."

Mrs. Dering paused; a dead silence ensued, and her achievement of free board and lodging at other people's expense for the next six months did not appear to receive that rapturous applause which it had gained in her own mind, for the countenance of Theresa was covered with clouds, and that of Mr. Chetwode blank

with dismay ; his mother appeared truly grieved and Marian absolutely animated.

But what mattered looks, feelings and disapprobation where Mrs. Dering was concerned ? No law was ever firmer than her will, and no plan devised by her was ever without its object, and full well did Theresa feel and know that fact, when, after hearing that their departure was still to take place on the Monday following, she followed her mother in silence up to her own room.

There, in that solemn retreat, devoted to many a maternal lecture, did Mrs. Dering unfold the adventures of the day, and the reasons which had influenced her change of plans. There was it that Theresa became aware that it was she herself who was the innocent cause of a measure so repugnant to her, as leaving town when the season was just getting delightful. For the first time, Mrs. Dering mentioned the name of Mark Chetwode to her daughter, and the startled eye and the cheek growing paler and

paler did not fail to exhibit to her observation that Theresa bore a woman's heart beneath the cold and cultivated exterior, and that some real feeling smouldered in it which might require more power to eradicate than the mother had hitherto exercised.

Mr. Chetwode's indifference in the early part of their acquaintance, his sudden change, his evident admiration, and lastly his unmistakeable preference, were subjects all fully brought before the young girl's notice in their most attractive light. His position, his amiability and his fortune, were ably descanted on, and the fair prospects, apparently, opening before Theresa formed altogether a theme on which Mrs. Dering could have enlarged for ever, had not her daughter stopped her, in the midst of a brilliant winding up, by asking if all this meant that Mr. Chetwode had proposed for her to her mother?

Nothing is so disagreeable as a plain question which can be answered in a moment by a plain

negative or affirmative, when we are wandering and luxuriating in fields of flowery language. Mrs. Dering felt checked in a very provoking manner, and almost forgot half that she had been rehearsing all the way home! her negation, however, was clothed in its most ambiguous form, and the most important part of her lecture now commenced.

“With such a chance as an offer from Mr. Chetwode, in remotest view, you cannot be surprised, Theresa, at my trying to remove every impediment which might possibly deter him from some time or other coming forward.”

“And to remove every impediment,” interrupted the belle, “you remove myself from his immediate notice?”

“No—I remove you from an influence,” returned Mrs. Dering, steadily, “which I have lately had reason to suspect may prove a very serious impediment! I take you, ere it be too late, from a daily intercourse with one between whom and yourself, his poverty and our penni-

less condition, places an insurmountable barrier. I remove you, whilst Mr. Chetwode's feelings towards you are newly awakened, and consequently strong—before your conduct chills him into retreat, and whilst he is sufficiently governed by a novel impulse, to take, perhaps, the immediate steps which your approaching departure render necessary. In this, Theresa, I am sure you feel that I have toiled only for your advantage?"

"In a worldly point of view, yes," said Theresa.

"In every point of view, my child; you appear to me to have made a brilliant conquest—time will show if I am right or wrong; but if right, your happiness is secured."

"Do not use the word happiness," exclaimed Theresa scornfully, "Mr Chetwode is rich, and so far I may secure certain advantages; but as to happiness!—it is nonsense to call a good match happiness unless one cares for the person one marries."

“I do not know where you learnt that sentiment,” was Mrs. Dering’s answer, “but it is something quite new and very absurd; you require a great deal of teaching still, Theresa, but I always thought you had learnt the miseries of poverty too well, to throw yourself away on one, who can never support you properly.”

“I am not going to throw myself away, Mamma, and I wish you would avoid accusations which you may find some day to be unjust.”

“I hope I may,” said her mother pointedly; and there the conversation was interrupted by the weighty business of the toilet, the two girls retiring to their room, each full of what they had heard, and silent to each other.

In that interview, no name had been uttered, yet the inuendos had been perfectly understood; Theresa had been startled by no well known sound, (and what startles more than a name to which an interest is attached?) but there had been no need for her mother to pronounce it—

she well knew to whom the dialogue had had reference, and she dressed herself out with an aching heart, which for the first time in her life, ambition had no power to assuage. Her mother's conversation had told her, for the first time in her life, that the realities of the world were coming at last—hitherto flirtations had been the game—now it was marriage, the irrevocable bond, and the heart of the young girl sank when she thought on the serious and awful moment, when, without one soul to pity her, without one friend less worldly than Georgy to sympathise with her, she should have to relinquish in silence the love that she certainly prized, in spite of all that made it forbidden, and play the part of wife to a man whom she had treated almost as a butt!

CHAPTER V.

NEVER had the toilet of Theresa Dering taken so little time as it did that evening—she hardly even looked at herself in the glass, but sat listlessly under the decorative hands of the lady's maid, till the last ringlet was put in its proper place.

Unlike most beauties, Theresa was vain, therefore Georgy knew she must be suffering very unusually, to be so careless about her appearance, particularly on that last evening ; but she was evidently not disposed to be communi-

cative or confidential, therefore Georgy, with considerate tact, forbore to remark on the interview that had just taken place.

Meanwhile Theresa completed her arrangements with the greatest rapidity, and descended to the drawing-room, finding it as she had hoped and expected, empty. She flew to Mrs. Chetwode's writing table—every implement was ready for use, and with a hurried hand she began tracing some words on paper—the lines were few—they might perhaps have been longer, but steps, the creaking sounds of a heavy tread, were heard approaching, and with perfect coolness she folded the paper into a band, and wrapped it round her bouquet just as Mr. Chetwode entered the room.

He gave one look round, and then closing the door advanced to her side:—

“ Oh, Theresa!—Miss Dering—how glad I am to have one moment to tell you how mournfully I shall miss you, when you are gone !”

Theresa tried to smile, for the simplicity of

the speech amused her, but the expression of her smile had lost its brightness, and Mr. Chetwode imagined that perhaps she participated in feelings which filled his own honest heart at the prospect of their approaching separation. But whatever her looks might say, her words belied them, for they were gay, and she uttered some common-place about its being pleasant to be missed, in a tone of forced cheerfulness.

How should Mark Chetwode know it was forced? How should he, good man, fancy that duplicity could dwell on those beautiful lips, or imagine that one so young, could play a part? —no, but he now knew her well enough to judge her more by looks than words; and the saddened smile and pale cheek re-assured him, as he fixed his eyes on her face; he flattered himself a kindred sentiment existed between them, and he enjoyed the happiness so peculiar to lovers; that is, he was miserable.

Whilst the cloaking and shawling for the

opera was going on, Theresa underwent another lecture of cautions from Mrs. Dering ; and had her *innamorato* heard her petulant replies, he might have been slightly disenchanted.

The day of filial respect seems now pretty well gone by. Daughters answer their mothers, and sons argue with their fathers ; we no longer tremble in the presence of our parents, or wait in humble patience till we obtain permission to sit down before them, but the son takes delight in talking the old man down, whilst the daughter shocks her mother's simple ear by sporting strange sentiments, and reading her lessons from a new work on worldly wisdom, published long since *her* less sophisticated time !

The Opera that night was new. The Dering's box was on the pit tier, and seated in front with her mother, Theresa and Mr. Chetwode in the chairs at the back, and Mr. Keating leaning his curly, perfumed head against the box in front, as he stood beneath, Georgy

was wrapt in ecstasies of delight, which made her oblivious to all her neighbours save her "singing man," who was the only being near her who could enter into her raptures. The pair at the back were singularly silent, and Mrs. Dering, apparently too busy hunting out friends and acquaintance to take heed of what was passing, when suddenly the door was opened, and Mr. Sydenham walked in.

No presence could have been much more unwelcome than his at that moment, for Mrs. Dering had been congratulating herself all the evening on the admirable opportunity she was affording Mr. Chetwode, by allowing Theresa to sit in the shade, if he chose to take advantage of the time, and now the tête-à-tête was disturbed by the most dangerous interloper who could possibly have appeared—the very man of all others whom she would rather have had a hundred miles off!—but after all the fine things she had said about him to Mrs. Chetwode in presence of her son, she was obliged to receive

him with the warm cordiality due to one for whom she had asserted she felt the "affection of a mother,"—and this made it all the more provoking.

Theresa however conducted herself to admiration; she sat wherever her mother chose to suggest, and hardly addressed a syllable to Mr. Sydenham—once only a few words passed between them, and they were so trivial, that they were unheeded by her companions—her bouquet was the subject of them.

"How beautiful your flowers are to-night—more so even than usual, Miss Dering."

"Yes—because they were a present from dear Mrs. Chetwode—so kind of her, was it not? but the paper I wrapped round the stalks has become so wet that my gloves will be ruined. Will you take it off, and throw it away?"

And Theresa held out the stalks towards Mr. Sydenham.

"I will do you a still greater service," said

he as he unrolled it. "Get some more and save your gloves."

He left the box and returned with a paper of bonbons, which were soon distributed, and their envelope placed round the bouquet. "Cleverly managed," was his observation as he returned it to its owner, to which the reply was, "Yes—it required so much art!"

And Mark Chetwode rejoiced in his inmost heart that that lip could curl and that voice be scornful to others beside himself—even to Edward Sydenham!

It was now come to the last day—the last evening was approaching—and the Chetwodes vied with each other in making the most of their parting guests, so much so, that to avoid being separated more than was necessary they were all to go to afternoon service at Westminster Abbey together.

When every one was ready and waiting only for Theresa, she came down, and declared herself too tired to go! In vain Mrs. Dering looked

and persuaded—in vain Miss Chetwode offered to stay at home with her—nothing would do but that she must be left to herself, and then perhaps she might revive again sufficiently to appear at dinner; Georgy looked doubtfully at her sister, hardly knowing whether she were in earnest or only acting, but Theresa had turned away.

“You are not really tired?” she asked, in a whisper.

“I behaved so well last night,” was the answer, “that to-day I shall reward myself.” And Theresa was left behind.

Half an hour afterwards, unannounced, (for Victor, lounging at the street-door, had admitted him) Mr. Sydenham entered the room.

“Your most obedient servant,” said he; “I come at your summons, though the damp stalks had so obliterated the writing, that I could hardly make out the hour—am I a good guesser?”

Perhaps it was not Theresa's fault that she

was deceitful—perhaps it was not in her nature originally, to try and circumvent those under whose authority she was obliged to yield. But she had been brought up with a bad method—alternately thwarted for her wilfulness, and spoiled for her beauty—and now in the spring-time of her life, the seeds that had been sown, were springing up, and budding into an abundant harvest for Mrs. Dering's especial benefit.

Theresa's model had always been her mother—that mother who, though her child was of an age to see the shallowness of the principles she inculcated, and despise their folly, still persisted in the same moral education, and went on,

“With a horde of worldly maxims,
Preaching down a daughter's heart !”

Mrs. Dering had but one end and aim in life, and that was, to marry her daughters well. A spinster was a deplorable object in her eyes, and she never scrupled to talk to Georgy and

Theresa in the most unreserved manner as to the odium of a life of single-blessedness.

“Besides,” she often added in conclusion, “how on earth can you expect, with my small means, that I can go on from season to season taking you about, and dressing you well?—You must both establish yourselves, my children, for I give you my word I cannot afford to have old maids on my hands—they are nothing but an expense to their relations and a torment to their friends, so if you are good and dutiful, as you always have been, you will own I am justified in making an effort for you.”

With such a mother, was it surprising that Theresa was deceitful? There was hardly a spark of romance in that young girl’s disposition, otherwise with an admirer like Mr. Sydenham at her feet, she might have proved exceedingly troublesome; but no, she was herself anxious to marry well, for she had tasted of poverty, and its bitterness made her shudder—at the same time she saw no harm in keeping

up a flirtation with Mr. Sydenham, even after she were married (provided she found no one she preferred by that time;) and this also was hardly surprising, for she was Mrs. Dering's daughter and pupil, and had finished her education in Paris, where young married women, gadding about with a declared lover for ever at their elbows, was a sight familiar to her eyes.

Consequently Theresa Dering argued within herself that it was better to be married, and free to flirt with one whose appearance did credit to her taste, than single, and incessantly lectured as to how much she might talk, and how little she might encourage.

No wonder then that Edward Sydenham, who had known her before she was introduced, should be surprised at finding her so altered after a residence of two years abroad; no wonder that he, who had coveted her heart when it was fresh and unsullied, should marvel what power had worked the metamorphose, and ex-

claim in undisguised astonishment the first evening they met again after that lapse of time—

“ Oh Theresa ! why are you so changed ? ”

When the Dering and Chetwode party returned from their afternoon's expedition Theresa was radiant ;—her indisposition had miraculously vanished, and her accomplished mother saw at a glance that there was some cause for her high spirits.

Attached as that mother and daughter really were at heart, it was perfectly extraordinary how each exulted, if, in their worldly tactics, one had managed to outwit the other. Mrs. Dering was determined, however, to fathom the mystery in the present case, and as she left the drawing-room she carelessly asked the old footman who happened to be at the door, if anyone had called in her absence.

“ No ma'am—no one ! ” was the answer, and Mrs. Dering was more mystified than ever.

At dinner the conversation was one string of regrets, and amongst other things Mrs. Chetwode

regretted her guest had not allowed her time to give an evening party, to bid some of their friends adieu. Mrs. Dering assured her that they had very few friends for whom they would have permitted her to take so much trouble, and gave her to understand that almost all the love of her capacious heart was centred in the house in Hill-street.

“ Still,” said Mrs. Chetwode smiling at Georgy, “ I think my friend Georgina would have enjoyed a few more laborious hours with Mr. Champneys and Mr. Keating.”

“ Not I indeed !” returned Georgy, “ for Mr. Champneys begins to correct my faults which I dislike, and you know we are going to the Keating’s so we shall not lose *him* long.”

“ Then I have another fair friend,” continued the old lady, “ and she also has a great ally—she knows who I mean.”

Mrs. Dering was ready to expire lest Theresa should blush, but the young lady was too wise—not a shade of colour deepened the tinge of

her cheek, but raising her brilliant eyes full of sparkling mischief to her mother's face she exclaimed—

“ Oh, yes! quite well!—you mean Mr. Sydenham; but we manage to gather our friends round us in a delightful manner, for by a curious coincidence, his regiment is quartered at Dorchester.”

Two people present were struck dumb by this announcement—Mrs. Dering, and Mr. Chetwode; as for the latter he looked as if it had been his death blow, and to Mrs. Dering it was a flash of light, illumining all the circumstances of that afternoon and the evening before, which had till then been enveloped in darkness. It was also an announcement which she felt was calculated to do her plans the greatest injury, unless by some means, she could say something to the mother which would bear repetition to the son—something to show him that there were no grounds for the startled alarm which his countenance had expressed,

and that Mr. Sydenham, for whom she felt as a mother was nothing more to her daughters than a brother.

As the evening closed in, the opportunity occurred. Side by side sat the friends of earlier days, and at some distance, Georgy and Marian Chetwode talked together. In the twilight of the window were the dark outlines of two figures—Theresa and Mr. Chetwode, the former flirting as unconsciously as her mother could possibly wish, and playing the artless young lady to a pitch of perfection which entranced still more completely, the man who was ready for any sacrifice if it could lead to being *her* victim.

Mrs. Dering's conversation was very pleasing to Mrs. Chetwode's ear, for it ran entirely on her daughters, for whom the old lady now felt quite an affection. Their future prospects in life was the chief theme—Mrs. Dering sighed when she looked forward—she knew mothers in general wished to marry off their daughters,

but she confessed she could not understand the wish herself—her children were all the world to her, and she should be a lost being without them.

“As for Georgy, I really sometimes fear she likes Mr. Keating, and though in a worldly point of view he would be a good match, still he really has nothing to recommend him but his singing—he has no mind—no steady, business-like habits, suited to a girl like Georgy—he delights in travelling, and I should lose my child altogether, and to a mother whose object is actually more to grudge her daughters, than to give them away, the prospect of marriage is quite melancholy!—now I dare say, dear friend, you think me an original for such sentiments?”

“I respect you for them, Theresa,” said the guileless listener, “and they coincide entirely with my own—still I own that, possessing such, I am surprised at your allowing the attentions of so attractive, and, I should say, dangerous a person, as Mr. Sydenham.”

“ Oh do not call his actions *attentions* !” exclaimed Mrs. Dering, “ he has not a shadow of preference between the sisters !—as for Georgy, you know what I said I suspected, and Theresa, oh my dear friend, Theresa is such a strange girl—she never had a preference in her life—besides, I know a little secret of Edward Sydenham’s private history—I often have a little joke about the bestowal of *his* heart! thus you see I am not so imprudent as you think, for as far as *my* girls are concerned, he is the safest person I could have about them !”

With this stone, Mrs. Dering had killed several birds, and she knew it perfectly well ; no one knew better than herself that you cannot bring forward a more powerful negative to a supposed attachment, than an adroit insinuation that you know where the accused individual’s affections are in reality placed. You may deny a suspected attachment for ever, and your listener will smilingly disbelieve you, even on your oath, but if you only breathe a

hint of attraction in another quarter, suspicion is disarmed, and ocular demonstration itself set aside as a wrong impression !

Thus it was with Mrs. Chetwode. The speech of her friend pleased her, though she hardly knew why—yet she felt a sort of satisfaction in thinking, that Theresa had never had a preference in her life, and that Mr. Sydenham's affections were engaged—two assertions unblushingly made, to crown the last hour spent by Mrs. Dering, in a house which she had entered by a *ruse*, and left with a falsehood !

CHAPTER VI.

BUT now, the dream was over, and the spell was broken ;—black Monday dawned, the Derings departed, and the quiet old house in Hill-street was desolate.

It was never desolate before—never dull during the many long years it had harboured its present inmates, yet somehow it did seem dull now, and that first day the whole party felt as if light had left the dwelling, and a strange silence crept over them which neither seemed willing to be the first to break.

This is a natural feeling on the departure of any guests who have made some stay, and it wears off with time—a few hours are sometimes enough to dispel the gloom of an ordinary leave-taking, but in the present case it was not so.

Day after day passed, and time wore on, and still, about Mark Chetwode's heart, the chills seemed gathering more and more; he began by silence, which grew into moodiness; and when pertinaciously questioned by his mother as to his health, he turned impatient, and little by little absented himself from his home.

He was no longer punctual—he was no longer to be depended on;—sometimes he kept dinner waiting, and never returned till late, and at other times he would say they were not to expect him, for he should probably ask a friend to dine with him at his club;—in short Mark Chetwode was an altered man, yet those who lived with him were the last to see it. At first his mother had noticed that there was something unusual about him and she thought

he read too much, but any remarks seemed so much to annoy him, that she had at last desisted, and it was not till the arrival of her sister-in-law, Mrs. Bellingham, that the subject was again revived.

Mrs. Bellingham was a very different character to Mrs. Chetwode;—she was the impersonification of a woman of the world, and having lived all her life in one continual round of society, if not gaiety, she had acquired a worldly tact and knowledge, which perhaps all the art in the universe would never have instilled into the obstinately pure mind of her sister-in-law.

Mrs. Bellingham also was a widow. She had lost her husband just as her two only children, daughters, were of an age to be introduced, and thus a full sense of her responsibilities as a mother came suddenly upon her, and she had studiously sought none but the best and first society in order that they should settle well. So far she had succeeded, for one married Earl Rydal, of Ringmere, in the

county of Dorset, and the other, the Dean of H * * * and became the Hon. Mrs. Varley, her husband being a junior in a noble family.

People wondered how Mrs. Bellingham ever got into such a high set as that in which she moved, for she had no grandee to push or *proner* her, and she never toadied—she never took any apparent trouble about it either, but if ever her daughters appeared in society without her, it was sure to be under the auspices of some acknowledged leader in the gay world, and how this was managed nobody knew.

There was one point certainly, in which Mrs. Bellingham always excelled, and that was her dinners, for she gave the most *recherché* little parties possible, and never asked less than eight, or more than ten people to assemble at the round table which was so admirably served.

Then her guests were principally men, and the best men she knew, for she had lived long enough to be aware, that few worth having,

care to go to a house that has only an "evening party" reputation.

Whilst her daughters were unmarried she especially avoided asking any young girls who might interfere with their prospects; and the season that Lord Rydal appeared in the hemisphere, people thought Mrs. Bellingham must be dead, she was so exceedingly *reclusive*, "because," as she muttered to a confidential friend, "I see something very advantageous in view for my Blanche."

And certainly Blanche caught the Earl, and the Earl was desperately in love with his prize too; and when Time had gathered five little beings round the lordly hearth, Mrs. Bellingham had the satisfaction of seeing that the happiness of the circle had grown with the growth of each, and that she had really done well for her child.

The Dean, Dr. Varley, was also a good match, and Mrs. Bellingham had given a cor-

dial consent to it, for he was Honorable as well as Reverend, and she decidedly liked the aristocracy, whatever she might say to the contrary? therefore Gertrude Varley married an elderly man because she really liked him, and Mrs. Bellingham gained a great reputation.

All this happened in bygone years—she was at the present time an old woman, peculiarly plain in person and particularly disagreeable in manner; blunt to a degree, yet still courted by an innumerable circle of friends, and still giving her delicate dinners, but now to the most entertaining, instead of the most eligible of her acquaintance.

Her round table now rarely numbered more than six seats: four of these guests were whist-players, and the fifth was generally some one who would amuse her, and tell her what was going on in the world, of which she began at last to weary. Her singular *brusquerie* bore the name of eccentricity, and she was called a

most amusing old woman by all who had the good fortune to be considered fit to be visited.

Part of the year she spent in Paris, seeing everything and going everywhere, yet returning to town every April without a single new fashion. Her dresses were made by one of the first dress-makers, but as she invariably sent her own pattern, and insisted on having it copied to a stitch—where was the good of that? Her caps were rather better, but they also underwent a little improvement from her own hands before she accounted them worthy to be worn; and as to her wig, prompted by a delusion which is not only popular but universal with old ladies—she had had it made (when Lady Rydal laughed at her grey curls) exactly the colour she remembered her hair to have been at the age of seventeen!

How well this suited a complexion of sixty or seventy, my readers have doubtless had many opportunities of judging, therefore that may rest; but such was Mrs. Bellingham—such the

old lady who, the day after her arrival for her six months of London, trotted up to Mrs. Chetwode's door on the arm of her companion, and knocked with an imperative hand.

Before admittance is given, pause for one instant to glance at the individual so carelessly named as her companion; pause to gaze at her on whom the attractions of Paris had not been lost, but on whose pretty figure and pretty face all the last graces were worn with dainty coquettishness.

On her arm, in a mass of lace and fringe, lay something solid, which the loud rat-tat-tat of Mrs. Bellingham aroused from its dreams, and as the head of the companion drooped, a still smaller head was raised, and a tiny nose, surmounted by two large, lustrous eyes, protruded from the midst of Miss Vere's black ringlets. The sharpest and shrillest of barks then announced that "*dans un petit corp s'allume un grand courage,*" and Mimi became violently excited, fired by the sight of a cat in the area

and indignant at entangling his paws in Miss Vere's long corkscrews.

Miss Vere was Mrs. Bellingham's humble companion, and though treated with the most blunt kindness and rough affection, was invariably described to all the old lady's friends as an idiot.

"Better she should be a fool than a knave, however," was Mrs. Bellingham's apology; "and though she has not two ideas, she does very well for me, for her manners are good and her memory perfect."

"Vere" was of course a *nom de guerre*. Mary was her christian, and Smith, perhaps, her surname, but Mary Vere sounded best, consequently it was adopted, and where she herself dropped from, nobody knew; she was very pretty, so gentlemen told her it must have been from the skies, for the colour of her eyes told tales; and that was a joke at which she never failed to laugh, even if it were uttered

fifty times a day, whereupon Mrs. Bellingham would exclaim,

“Don’t make that girl a greater fool than she is;” and Miss Vere did not mind the imputation in the least.

When Mrs. Bellingham entered her sister-in-law’s drawing-room, her quick but dim eye took a survey of the room and noted every article in it at one glance, a faculty some people possess to a remarkable degree, particularly with regard to one’s toilet.

And here, *par parenthèse*, let a prayer be breathed, that good angels defend us from the morning visiter whose eyes, during the whole of a long conversation, wander from one’s head to one’s feet, and end by fixing themselves on some little deception which we fancied defied detection.

In the course of that cool and sweeping glance, Mrs. Bellingham saw that things were all in their places, just as she had left them six

months before, so she fell into a chair to take breath, and wait till Mimi had done barking.

“Well—how are you all? just the same?—quite well?—never stirred an inch I suppose since I saw you last—and where is Mark, and how is he? as stoopid as ever of course.”

There was one great peculiarity in Mrs. Bellingham’s conversation, and that was, her pertinaceous usage of obsolete pronunciations; nothing would induce her to say “stupid” for *stoopid*, and she always expressed thanks by saying she was much “obleegeed.”

Her enquiries after Mark were good humouredly answered both by his mother and sister, and his aunt was assured that he had quite come out lately, and actually dined out two and three times a week.

“High time he should,” said Mrs. Bellingham, “and I am glad to hear it, for I always expect to find feathers growing over him some day—he might just as well be an owl at once,

for all the communion he keeps up with his fellow-creatures—what is he about now?”

“Still reading very hard, and rising in his profession rapidly we trust, but lately we have had great interruptions, and Mark has seemed quite to have lost his spirits, since the excitement of our guests so suddenly ceased.”

“Guests?—upon my word, what next? What guests have you had here?”

“Mrs. Dering and her two daughters,” said Mrs. Chetwode, “she was a friend of mine in my youth, and we had not met for very many years.”

“Dering?—Dering?” repeated Mrs. Bellingham, “where have I heard that name?—what do I know about Mrs. Dering, Mary Vere?”

Mary Vere possessed one great virtue, and that to Mrs. Bellingham was invaluable, for it was her extraordinary memory; she never forgot a face, nor a word that was spoken to her—was never at a loss for a name, and was

ready without a moment's hesitation to prompt Mrs. Bellingham whenever she required her assistance. Mrs. Bellingham was one of those who knew something about every soul in the world, almost, but now that she was growing old, she stood in need of a key to the treasure-house of her memory, the lock of which was no sooner touched, than out flew anecdote upon anecdote, many of which had once been powerful enough to attach themselves to their subjects for life.

Mary Vere was that key, and the instant Mrs. Dering's name was mentioned, her answer was ready.

"Yes, dear Madam—a lady with two daughters who were much spoken of in Paris—one daughter being singularly lovely."

"Pshaw, stuff, and nonsense!" (this was Mrs. Bellingham's favourite expression) — "what taste you have, Mary Vere—you will never be better; but now I recollect exactly who you mean," she added, turning to Mrs. Chet-

wode, "there cannot be two such women in the world as Mrs. Dering, and I know all about her."

"Then you visited?"

"She called on me, my dear—she got up a story of an old acquaintance with you, and took upon herself to call—"

"But she *is* an old acquaintance," interrupted Mrs. Chetwode; "I knew her as a girl, and I may really say she was my only friend in my younger days."

"Then in your older and wiser days drop her," said Mrs. Bellingham, "she is a bad style of woman, and the girls are well dressed fools, like most girls of the present day—but you must not cultivate her, Susan: indeed you must build an iron wall against her, for brick and mortar would not keep that woman out of one's house—she pushed fairly into mine, and I conclude she pushed into this as well—otherwise how did she get here?"

Mrs. Chetwode related the circumstances, and Mrs. Bellingham chuckled with delight.

“How like Mrs. Dering!—how completely the same mother of the two marriageable young ladies who were trotted out in every kind of society in Paris!—Yes, yes, I know her, and the wax doll Theresa, I know her too by sight.”

“But I hope,” again interrupted Mrs. Chetwode in rather an annoyed voice, “that you at least left a card in return for her visit?”

“Indeed, my dear, I did not—I called myself and went in—I never leave a card upon objectionable people, for they keep it clean for ever, and exhibit it, and there it is in black and white against you as long as a shred of it lasts!—no, I go in and come out again, and leave no trace behind; and if they say ‘Not at home,’ I say I have forgotten my card-case. But where was I?—Mary Vere, don’t I know something about Mrs. Dering? What was I saying about her?”

"It was about Miss Theresa Dering," said the prompter.

"True—Lord bless me!" exclaimed Mrs. Bellingham with a shake of the head between each word, "how hard she did try to marry that girl of hers! what arduous pains! what ingenious devices! I know now what I was thinking of—one night she managed to get to a ball at some very good house (no one knew how, but her plans were all wheel within wheel), and I myself saw her play one of her tricks. Miss Dering was engaged to dance with young Sir Henry Wharton, (a great *parti* and a great puppy, like young baronets in general,) whereupon your dear friend quietly made her way into some of the other rooms, and so effectually hid herself, that Sir Henry had the charge of the young lady half the evening, to the indignation of all the other mothers, who did not know the trick, and fancied he had proposed and was accepted!"

There was a pause when Mrs. Bellingham

ceased speaking, and Mrs. Chetwode was some time before she broke the silence into which vexation had plunged her.

“But Marian,” she at last suddenly exclaimed, turning to her daughter, “if this is indeed the Theresa Dering that we seem to know so well, add your testimony to mine to assure your aunt how very different both she and her daughters appeared to us—Surely one person could never possess two such totally different characters?”

“I do not accuse Mrs. Dering of possessing only two characters,” resumed Mrs. Bellingham, “I believe she has about twenty; but, Lord bless me! what is she to us?—let her rest now, and tell me how Mark is? Why trouble one’s head about that silly, vain woman—it is your friend—there is but one Widow Dering, so cut her in future, now that you have got rid of her.”

“Well,” said Mrs. Chetwode with half a sigh, “if I am forced to believe what you tell me about her anxiety for her daughters; I

must at all events say one word for herself—She toils only for them; she is only silly and vain on *their* account!”

“She is vain to her heart’s core, and was so long before these girls troubled her,” persisted Mrs. Bellingham, “and I recollect an anecdote of her which will prove it—Mary Vere, had she not an Indian husband?”

“In the Indian army,” said Miss Vere.

“Of course—you did not think I meant he was black?—well, they were once on a march up the country, as they call it, and slept in tents, and all sorts of strange places, and it happened in the dead of one night, an alarm was given, of the enemy. Captain Dering was at his post, and his wife was sleeping like a rock, when an armed man stood by her side, and woke her by seizing her wrist. What do you suppose her first impulse was? any goose even, would say, to scream, but no—Mrs. Dering saw by the glitter, that something splendid was in the tent, and that was enough for her—no

noise and no screaming—but she had a redness in her nose, and she covered it with powder at night—her first action was, *to rub off the powder*—and *then* I believe she screamed—however that is a fact, and when a woman, surrounded by dangers, can think of personal appearance before personal safety, never tell me, my good sister, that vanity is not inherent in her constitution!”

CHAPTER VII.

It was not to be expected but that this conversation, so nearly regarding one who had been domesticated in her house, should make its due impression on Mrs. Chetwode's mind. It sank deeply, indeed, and many an hour did she sit pondering over every syllable that had been uttered, until her early friend stood before her in a totally different light.

It never entered into Mrs. Chetwode's head to doubt a single sentence of her sister-in-law's

testimony, for Mrs. Bellingham had her subject too much by heart to admit a doubt as to its truth. She had told all she knew with such clear rapidity, that her listeners were convinced she spoke from her own personal knowledge and observation, and therefore Mrs. Dering was as completely condemned in Mrs. Chetwode's mind, as if she had been tried by judge and jury.

Deep regret that the wily widow had so successfully taken her in, and a gnawing uneasiness lest ill consequences should arise from her credulity, now rendered the old lady's couch thorny to a degree, and the increasing gloom of her darling son's manner woke a thousand fears in her breast, lest the suspicions which lurked there, and which she had not even breathed to Marian—that Mark was pining for the beautiful Theresa—should be but too true.

Sometimes she thought she would speak to him in confidence, but the moment she was alone with him, she shrank from the task,

dreading the certain misery of confirmation, and preferring rather to worry herself to death, and preserve outward peace, than perhaps wound the feelings of one, whose happiness was far dearer to her, than her own.

This state of affairs continued for several days, and it was evident that the confidential feelings existing amongst that trio were at last shaken, for Mark had *his* secret and the mother had *hers*, and Marian felt that there was an awkwardness now, in speaking of the Derings; so in fact it had become a silent name, till Mrs. Bellingham, who did not possess the bump of veneration, and had no "respect of persons" of any degree, brought the subject again on the *tapis*, during a morning visit which she paid for that express purpose.

Mary Vere was left outside to walk up and down Hill-street with Mimi, for Mrs. Bellingham had discovered a secret that alarmed her, and not even Mary Vere was considered trustworthy enough to be made a party to it, there-

fore Mrs. Bellingham made her entrée alone, bent on finding out whether Mark had kept his own counsel, or whether the trio were in league to keep her in the dark, and deceive her, as to the unfortunate attachment which she was perfectly certain he had formed.

People judge so much of others by themselves, that for the first few minutes, during which she was employed in feeling her way, she fancied Mrs. Chetwode was trying to delude her, but the natural guilelessness of the latter soon shone out, and Mrs. Bellingham saw that to her alone belonged the triumph, of announcing the fatal fact, that Mark, their excellent, their invulnerable, had lived his last day of indifference to female charms, and was in short, a lost and ruined man.

“He called on me the other evening, on his way home,” said Mrs. Bellingham; “and my attention was immediately attracted by his appearance—never saw such a change in my life—looks ten years older, and smoke-dried

into a perfect object; so I questioned him till he must have wished me in the Red Sea, pretending that I thought it was his liver—knowing all the time as well as he does himself that it was his heart.”

Mrs. Chetwode well remembered the evening in question; she remembered Mark's coming home weary, irritable, and dispirited: she remembered the silent and abstracted hours that had preceded their separation for the night, and the many times he had appeared as if about to tell the subject of his thoughts, and then, suddenly checking himself as the words were apparently on his lips.

All this she remembered, and sighed to think what Mark must have suffered, beneath the covert lash of his inquisitive aunt.

But Mrs. Bellingham's energetic address appeared to require an answer, and Mrs. Chetwode was at a loss what to say. Her hesitation, however, was rightly interpreted.

“I see your thoughts,” was her visiter's hasty

exclamation. "You feel that I am right, and yet you do not like to own it. You know that Mark is a doomed man;—had I been his mother instead of you, I would have saved him.

"From what?" faltered Mrs. Chetwode, who wished to hear her thoughts embodied in words by any lips in the world but her own. "How could I save him from dangers of which I was not aware?"

"You were not aware of them once, but you are now; you know that Mark is falling a victim to the Derings, (for mark my words, the man who marries either of those girls marries the whole three) and yet you sit there with your hands before you!"

"Simply because I dread stamping indelibly on his mind, an impression which after all, may be but transitory," said Mrs. Chetwode, and this sentence seemed to arrest the impatient torrent of her sister-in-law's words.

After a few moment's pause, however, it was again resumed; Mrs. Bellingham was not un-

reasonable, and she saw the wisdom of Mrs. Chetwode's last remark; she saw also a fine field before her for plotting, planning, and undermining, before finally blowing up the citadel of her nephew's hopes, therefore she agreed that for the present, silence would be their best policy; she agreed that there was much truth in the old proverb, that absence extinguishes a slight flame, as surely as it adds fuel to an ardent one, and if Mark had only been struck by the beauty of the dangerous guest, her opportune departure from beneath his admiring eyes, might have saved him from the impending fate of making, what Mrs. Bellingham called, "a fool of himself."

"All his additional stupidity at this moment" were her parting words—"may only be owing to the loss of their society, for I dare say they made the house cheerful, which must have been a novelty, and missed accordingly;—so, good sister Chetwode, take my advice, say nothing *direct* to him, but let him hear, *indirectly*,

all the anecdotes I told you the other day ; but by the bye," she suddenly added, " had they a courier with them ? a Swiss. "

" Yes, they had ;—Victor !"

" I know !—a man who plays Mrs. Dering's cards to perfection—a wily, deceitful, treasure of a man, who never said 'at home' to an ineligible, if an eligible happened to be sitting in the drawing-room !—yes, yes, I see they knew what they were about—but never mind, never mind ; if we save Mark, long live the Derings, for all *I* care !"

And Mrs. Bellingham rejoined Mary Vere. The perturbation of her mind had in a measure subsided ; Mark was not quite lost—he might still be saved—and as her glance rested on the pretty, insipid, but innocent face of her humble companion, an idea suddenly struck her that she was the very tool to effect the desired object of blighting the first shoot of admiration in its infancy ! Mary Vere could talk of the Derings without giving rise to any suspicions ;—Mary

Vere might tell all the anecdotes in her silly way without Mark Chetwode's imagining she had any object in doing so ; she could say what Mrs. Chetwode could not, and Mrs. Bellingham would not ; so as they walked home the mind of the latter had resolved its plan. Her nephew was to be asked to a *tête-à-tête* dinner, (the said Mary Vere being never counted, although always present) and the prompter was to learn her lesson beforehand ; Mark was to be initiated and his eyes opened ; little things which inflict great pain were to be said, and finally he was to return home disgusted : his first preference was to be proved folly, and his only love pronounced, false !

Meanwhile, the object of all this female solicitude was quietly pursuing his way, silently feeding on his own thoughts, and little dreaming that his welfare and worldly prospects were occupying so large a proportion of the time and temper of his eccentric relative, of whose ac-

quaintance with the Derings he was not even aware.

His mother and Marian had never told him of the disclosures which had been made with regard to their late guests—that was the forbidden subject—therefore when Mrs. Bellingham's invitation arrived, though he laughed at the term "*en tête-à-tête*," he accepted, without the remotest suspicion as to what she had to say to him.

He had often received invitations from her, similarly worded; he knew perfectly well that she had always a lecture for him, prepared for the occasion, and he remembered that the removal of the cloth was always the signal for its commencement, but the subjects were generally those which rather provoked his laughter than his contrition, therefore hitherto he had not benefited.

Sometimes Mrs. Bellingham would deplore to him his position in the world—a man without society; then it would be the profession

he had chosen—humdrum, and only equalled in gaiety to being buried alive; what was the good of a glow-worm in a cellar? when did he mean to shine out? Another time, his single state had very much displeased her;—he had a good three thousand a year—what on earth could he do with it? His mother, whose retentive memory might lead her back to his baby days, and delude her into the idea that he was still an infant, might say he had plenty of time before him to look about for a wife, but when a man began to cast retrospective glances on his five and thirtieth birthday, young ladies would cast sidelong ones on a grey hair here and there, and reflect whether they could not do better, before they married him.

“For in these expensive times,” the lecturer would say, “let me tell you, two or three thousand a year is not enough to tempt a girl.”

“Heaven forbid,” interrupted Mark one day, “that any girl should ever look upon my two or three thousand a year as a temptation! I

shall take care, my good aunt, that my happiness, if ever I marry, is not built on so frail a tenure."

Mrs. Chetwode, when Mark mentioned his invitation, had her misgivings, and felt nervous to a degree as the hour approached for his return. Though she had not been informed of the plan, she suspected that the dinner would never pass, without some allusion to the now all-engrossing theme, and as his step ascended the stairs, she laid down her work, and fixed her eyes steadily on the door.

He entered—much as usual—calmly and cheerfully—but his candle was in his hand, and, contrary to his usual habit of sitting down, and talking over the events of the evening, he wished both her and Marian a brief good-night, as though that were his unfailing custom, and left the room.

There was a pause.

"Marian," said Mrs. Chetwode in a suppressed voice, "something has happened—

something has been said—do you not see the change?”

Yes—Marian’s eyes were quite as clear-sighted as her mother’s, and this abrupt and unusual behaviour on the part of her brother was easily interpreted; perhaps the more easily by her, because all along she had seen what was going on, and whilst her mother only *suspected*, *she* was perfectly certain; her mother trembled lest a *dénouement* should arrive—Marian knew that it must, and only awaited it in grief and regret, for she felt, that all Mrs. Belingham had said about the Derings, was true.

Marian had heard that whispered sentence of Edward Sydenham’s:—

“ Oh Theresa, why are you so changed !”

She too had seen the paper round the stalks of the bouquet, conveyed so cleverly into his hand, and she had seen that there was writing on it; she knew also by chance that, that last Sunday, when Theresa heard their own old footman assert that no one had called—Marian

knew that Victor had admitted Mr. Sydenham ! And yet there stood Theresa, tacitly sanctioning the unconscious falsehood ! offering no denial, but glorying only in the feat of having outwitted her mother, as the sequel fully proved.

No wonder then that in grief, though in silence, Marian awaited the moment when the brother she worshipped, should once more withhold nothing from her, but repose in her that confidence, which he had so long received—when he should perhaps tell her that his mind was made up—(for Mark never wavered when once that was the case ;) and when with a sorrow which she dared not show, she should find that he was about to become the husband of a girl of whom she had no opinion, and the son-in-law and prey, of a woman whom all who knew her, despised !

Days elapsed—Mark was more from home than ever—Mrs. Bellingham was gone to spend the Ascot week with some of her grandees

near Windsor, and Mrs. Chetwode had taken the carriage to the city on business when, as Marian was sitting alone in the drawing-room, the door suddenly opened, and her brother walked in.

His appearance at that early hour of the afternoon was so singular, that she uttered an involuntary exclamation of surprise, followed by a thousand questions, as to whether illness or any unpleasant cause had induced his return.

“Indisposition—not illness,” was his answer “indisposition to remain any longer a prey to my gnawing thoughts, unsolaced by the advice of one sympathising soul;—Marian, the time is come, for us to have no more secrets—the opportunity has arrived for you and me to have a conference—to my mother I dare not appeal, at all events in the first instance, for her affectionate prejudices might influence her candour, but I come to you;—oh Marian!” he exclaimed with sudden vehemence, as he folded

his arms on the table and hid his face on them, “if you did but know how miserable I am!—”

Marian did know it—her heart ached for him, but a choking sensation in her throat stifled the words, with which she would fain have consoled him;—If the silent pressure of the hand which she slid into his could have spoken, he would have been comforted, but Mark Chetwode wanted words—he had been silent too long—his feelings had been too long pent up—he wanted a voice to open the flood-gates, that in a torrent of words he might disburden himself of the weight of his unhappiness.

He longed to speak of her, who had so unexpectedly appeared, as the star of his destiny, and no sooner did a few broken sentences from his sister, pave the way for unreserved confidence, than all his hopes were poured into her ear, and the supremacy of Theresa Dering placed beyond a doubt.

“I have struggled with the feeling—I have

vainly tried to subdue the impression—I have told myself innumerable times that she was not for me, and that her affections were no longer hers to bestow—at least on me!” he exclaimed; “but it will not do, Marian; she haunts me—she makes me wretched—I no longer care for my existence, for her sake, and yet, oh, Marian! the things they say of her!”

The climax had arrived—all the details of Mrs. Bellingham’s dinner “*en tête-à-tête*” were now unfolded, and had Marian only known of the plot between her aunt and the humble companion, she would have acknowledged that Mary Vere had played her part to a pitch of perfection, quite marvellous in one, who was generally accounted an idiot!

But there is a “tide in the affairs of men” in love, when volumes and volumes of even written evidence, would fail to injure the beloved object in their eyes—when all the inuendos, all the slander, all the envy, hatred, and malice, and lastly, all the truth, (be it

ever so plain and disagreeable) throws them but more completely at the idol's feet, and makes them but more determined to risk everything for one, whom people think it worth while to abuse, without reservation.

This was Mark Chetwode's case; a few weeks before, and he might have been deterred from the fatal pursuit, but now it was too late; he had fed on the memory of Theresa till she had become necessary to his existence; without her, his happiness was blighted, and it was this conviction that sealed his sister's lips. After he had indignantly repeated all that he had heard at Mrs. Bellingham's, he implored her to tell him if she believed one word of it—if she could think that Theresa were so completely her mother's willing tool—if she were indeed the heartless flirt, and the insatiable coquette?

Marian could not speak; she could not truly say "I do not believe!" neither could she find it in her heart, to dash the hopes of him

who was watching her lips with such trembling eagerness, remorselessly to the ground.

“ My dearest Mark, the evidence of our own eyes did not tell us so ! ” was all she could utter, and he caught at the modified sentence.

“ No ! and yet, Marian, we had several opportunities of judging !—shameful, shameful ! ” he added, as he rose and paced the room—“ shameful to slander that innocent young girl ! my astonishment is, that our Aunt Bellingham could quietly sit, and hear Mary Vere say all she did, without reproof ! ”

“ My Aunt disliked Mrs. Dering,” began Marian.

“ I know it,” interrupted her brother, “ but on what shallow grounds ! simply because she did not move in “ *the best set* ” in Paris ! in this crime, what participation could Theresa have ? but what are Mrs. Bellingham’s likes and dislikes to us, Marian ! My mother grew quite fond of Theresa. and you—you were reserved with her, my dear sister—but you admired her ? ”

The last words were spoken interrogatively, and Marian made an effort to reply ; she felt it a duty to call up her moral courage, and at the risk even of wounding his feelings, to prepare him, however slightly, for the repugnance with which the match would be regarded, by her mother, her aunt, and herself.

“ Personally, dear Mark, I certainly did admire her, for she was very beautiful, but there my admiration ceased ; as for my mother—”

“ Ah !” interrupted Mark Chetwode, exultingly, “ my mother’s admiration was not confined to Theresa’s face and figure only !—unless indeed Mrs. Bellingham and Mary Vere have prejudiced her by the same slander with which I was regaled !”

Marian quietly answered that they certainly had heard very much the same account, and Mark instantly interrupted her again.

“ And never mentioned it to me ?”

“ In the first place, because you gave us no opening—in the next, because you never told

us that the subject was one of such vital interest.

Mark felt the truth of this observation, and a long silence ensued. It was evident to him that in no quarter was his preference for Theresa Dering approved; but he was in that humour which took umbrage at the disapproval, and he who all his life had been the most obedient of sons, and the most dutiful of nephews, was now ready to set at nought the love of years, and fly in the face of all remonstrance and all advice.

As yet, he had been untried, but he knew his time was approaching. His suspicious eyes had seen that Mary Vere's babbling gossip was not unpleasing to Mrs. Bellingham—how little though, did he dream of their concerted plan. He gathered from the very few words that fell from her cautious lips, that she both disliked and looked down upon the Derings: he had just learnt from his sister that even her gentle nature rebelled against admiring the character

of Theresa; and worse than all, he saw a glance that his mother herself had gone over to the enemy, and would, most probably, only sanction his attachment tearfully and reluctantly, if she did not actually oppose it.

In this spirit was the colloquy between the brother and sister concluded, and in this unsatisfactory state was the subject left, when the return of Mrs. Chetwode terminated the interview, and drove her son, abruptly to his room.

CHAPTER VIII.

IF, as according to Shakespeare, there be a "winter of our discontent," we may naturally infer that we sometimes enjoy a "summer of content," and to no individual could this term more happily apply, perhaps, than to Mrs. Dering during her stay at the Keatings', for she was revelling in the very dog-days of satisfaction and self-congratulation.

She had now been an inmate of their house

some weeks, and everything had prospered to a wish ; they had excellent society, plenty of dinner parties, Theresa was exceedingly admired, and Mr. Keating had never before been known to stay so long at home, at a time, in his life, which was attributed with some justice, to the spell of Georgy Dering's presence and the charms of her music.

Now Mr. Keating was by no means a despicable match in Mrs. Dering's estimation ; her only fear was, that he was not a marrying man, and that Georgy might be wasting her time on him ; still as there was no one else in the way just then, she looked complacently on their constant musical tête-à-têtes, and was inwardly pleased to observe, that the old couple regarded them in the same light.

Morning, noon, and night, were Georgy and Mr. Keating now absorbed in profound studies of operas and oratorios ; in the country one so gladly seizes anything new, and Georgy was an accomplished musician, therefore there

was hardly a piece however difficult, whether for voice or piano, which she could not execute fairly at sight.

In addition to Mr. Keating's vocal powers, he was no mean performer on the flute, on which nothing but his violent temper prevented his becoming first-rate. The rages he used to fly into with his instrument and the person who happened to be accompanying him, very much retarded his progress, and till Georgy came to stay in the house, and practice steadily with him, the flute had been more of a torment than a pleasure; now, however, the scene was very different—good old music was revived and beautiful new operas practised till everyone was charmed, and Mr. Keating began to feel annoyed and injured when Georgina grew fatigued.

Mrs. Dering's sharp eyes saw this in a moment, and seized upon it as a good symptom. Georgy was properly admonished to suffer herself to be worn to a thread paper rather than

give way before the right time, and Mr. Keating spent every instant that he could spare from his cigars and his hunters, in her society.

So sped the summer days, and Mr. Keating still lingered in his home, instead of journeying one of the thousand ways which it was his wont to go at that season—Georgy Dering was the loadstone—Georgy Dering was the hindrance! and but for two impediments, he would undoubtedly have thrown himself at her feet.

The first impediment was, that she did not possess five hundred a year, which was his standard of female excellence;—the second, that there was a high note in her voice, an A, which nearly drove him mad. To the G she could attain with exquisite clearness and precision, but the A she surmounted by something approaching to a *ruse*—she just touched the note and then slid to one of her silvery lower ones, till he would fling his lute in the air and go off into a fit of frenzy.

Mr. Keating was "*janatico per la musica*,"

and it was out of his power to command himself when a wrong note was played, or a false one sung. The failure of a sound on his own instrument was worse than everything else, yet now and then all these mundane miseries would occur, and no one could help his being made wretched except Georgy! Georgy never played wrong notes in his hearing, for she practised her parts before the household were stirring, and as for the unfortunate A, which he declared drove him mad, she avoided it whenever it was in any way possible.

“If it were not for that note, Miss Dering,” said he one day, “that luckless A, which you cannot deny is defective, I would be your slave for life.”

And that was a figure of speech which Georgina knew meant nothing at all.

“But it is hardly fair to call it defective,” was her answer—“practice will make it perfect—even the flute has false tones, and the harp

false strings—why should not the human voice sometimes err?”

“Because it is the tutored servant of our will,” cried Mr. Keating, warming with his subject as usual—“we have it under our control, unless bad health should mar its perfection—you have not that excuse Miss Dering—you have no right to sing false. That A is without the shadow of a doubt defective!”

This, to a singer who prided herself on her ear, was beyond endurance. “You would put an angel out of temper,” murmured Georgy *sotto voce*, lest her mother in the back drawing-room (where her presence was quite unsuspected by Mr. Keating) should hear her.

“So would that note,” retorted Mr. Keating, waxing more and more wroth, “and you must forgive me if I make one more remark—you know I very seldom find fault.”

“Be candid,” said Georgy good humouredly. “I like to be told of my faults,” and a slightly sarcastic smile curled her lip.

“ Then I must really ask you to pay more attention to time ! Every day I have remained silent, hoping and trusting that it might be from our not, as yet, being quite in unison—but grieve to see we are just as far from keeping time together now, as we were when you first came, and you must forgive me if I say, that a bad timeist is enough to provoke even a saint !”

Georgina laughed outright ! *she* a bad timeist ?—*she*, for whom her mother had screwed, and starved and stinted, in order that she should be grounded by peerless old John Cramer, and finished by Herz ?—*she*, of whom both had said, that her rank amongst amateur pianistes was of the very highest ?—no ! that was too good ! so she bore it with exquisite temper, but from that moment Mr. Keating’s musical character fell in her estimation and she looked upon him as simply a mechanical genius—well trained and admirably taught.

The real fact was, Mr. Keating was a most

difficult person to accompany; However fine his execution might appear to listeners, his time was so exceedingly *ad libitum* that it was the most difficult thing in the world to keep pace with him, and as he had the reputation of being an excellent musician, all the blame of course fell upon the unhappy being, who was galloping after him on the piano.

Now all this might be very well for a time, but Mrs. Dering did not intend that it should last for ever; it was not for a summer's-day that she wished Georgy's reign to continue, and since Mr. Keating was the only person in their whole circle, whose attention was wholly Georgy's, and who never seemed to be aware of even the existence of Theresa, she was determined that if human skill could effect the object, it should be effected, and she should then have nothing left on her hands but the settlement of Theresa.

It was for this that she seated herself day by day in the adjoining room to that occupied by

the musicians. It was for this that she sat like a mouse behind the voluminous folds of muslin draperies, listening for some sentence which might convict, or at least commit, the prisoner ! It was for this that she watched and waited till hope at last began almost to grow dim, and finally it was for this that, in the middle of July, she pretended to think that the summer had ended, and that the term of her invitation had expired ; in fact that she must go !

The good old Keatings were much surprised at this announcement ; they were a matter-of-fact couple, and immediately feared that they had not worded their invitation intelligibly, so it was distinctly repeated.

“ We hoped you would spend the summer with us,” said Mrs. Keating, “ and we imagine that to last till the 1st. of September, when the Major fills the house with his shooting friends, and *my* season as I call it, ends. ”

“ Consequently,” chimed in the old man, “ if you can make it convenient to remain

until that day pray do ; if you cannot, we shall be very sorry."

Mrs. Dering saw that with so primitive a pair all manœuvring would be but thrown away, so for days and days afterwards she lay in ambush seeking for him whom she meant to destroy, and an admirable opportunity at last offered itself, of which she did not fail to take instant advantage.

Georgy and Mr. Keating had been at hard practice over some difficult duet one morning, and Georgy's beautiful voice had surmounted the defective A, and done its part to perfection, when suddenly, fatigued and hoarse, she rose from the piano, and with a half-uttered exclamation on the heat, and the necessity of fresh air, stepped out of the window and leisurely down the lawn, till her figure could only be seen at intervals, flitting through the shrubberies.

Mr. Keating looked after her for a moment, and then glanced at the flute-case, which

should he do? follow her, or have a good hour with his dearly beloved instrument? Had the key been in the case, Georgina would have lost the day, but as it was not, he spread his arms wide in the air after the manner of young men on a hot day, and in an idle mood, and looked as if he also were going out of the window in the direction of the shade.

At that moment Mrs. Dering felt a desperate woman; her heart, perhaps, beat a little quicker than it had ever done in her life, and she entered the room, inwardly trembling, though nerved to her task; she was the spider, about to pounce upon her fly.

Cleverly begun, cleverly led, and cleverly lengthened was that momentous conversation! Confused, surprised, and silenced by hearing Mrs. Dering, in so perplexing a manner, announce that circumstances obliged her to put a stop to these most enjoyable musical mornings Mr. Keating felt just guilty enough to be un-

able to ask any questions or explanation. All he could say was—

“Do the old lady and gentleman know that you talk of going?”

There was nothing in the world Mrs. Dering disliked so much as plain questions, and where she could possibly avoid giving a direct answer she would; therefore she replied that she had certainly hinted at it, though their kindness had prevented her being as explicit as perhaps she ought to have been.

Mr. Keating paused and walked towards the window, humming an air; Mrs. Dering was netting, her hands very gracefully held, and her head just a little on one side, so that she could turn up an eye now and then and see the effect of anything she said, without pointedly looking up. A few long moments elapsed, and she saw he was in a reverie—she must speak first herself, and she did so.

“I wish I might be candid with you—I wish, Mr. Keating, I might talk to you openly,

and yet feel that all I say is in the strictest confidence?"

"Pray do, Mrs. Dering!" was his answer, as he turned abruptly towards her; "I know of nothing on earth that should prevent you."

"Only the fear that you might be tempted in an unguarded moment to divulge—or I mean to show, that you are aware of my motives for curtailing our pleasurable visit here."

Mr. Keating swore secrecy in his usual careless way, and fixed his eyes on the widow's face as she hesitatingly proceeded.

She trusted to his honour never to breathe what she was going to say—her stay had been delightful—almost unalloyed, but not quite—she was aware that with all her caution and care, that her very position made her and her poor dear fatherless girls, objects of remark and conversation, and even in the pleasant neighbourhood in which they were then located, she grieved to say, their names had not been spared—remarks had decidedly been made.

“Country gossip!” interrupted Mr. Keating, with a sneer; “people must talk, Mrs. Dering!”

“Certainly! I know they must, and will, but it is my duty to give as little cause for conversation as possible, and I am pained to say, rumours have reached me in all directions.”

“Of what?” asked Mr. Keating, impatiently.

“And questions even have been asked me,” continued his companion, without noticing the interruption, “questions which have annoyed me beyond measure! You have been very kind to one of my little party, my dear Mr. Keating—I know that her great enjoyment here has been very much owing to you in fact; and I am sure you will be sorry when I tell you that it is that very kindness on your part that has shown me what I ought to do, and that has given rise to rumours so very painful to me, and—and so groundless.”

Mrs. Dering thought that last expression the best stroke she had played yet. Mr. Keating

had got very red at the beginning of her sentence, and as she proceeded, he began biting his lips and looking everywhere but in the direction of herself—he was evidently weighing her every word!

“So in conclusion,” she resumed, after a pause, a sigh, and a resigned smile, “I have only to entreat you to see the case in the light that I do! My poor dear girls have never, either of them, been *talked of* yet. I shudder when I think people may remark on them as they do on so many others whom circumstances launch into a gay, but alas! not a good-natured world; and so, dear Mr. Keating, I am going away, and much as people have certainly said, I earnestly trust I go in time to prevent a weight being given to their gossiping, which might convert the purest kindness and friendship on your part, into motives and intentions which I am certain I have never had the folly or vanity to dream of for one instant, myself!”

Mr. Keating had now commenced walking

up and down the room, following the scroll pattern of the carpet with the most careful steps, and turning and twisting for the better attainment of that object, in a manner both ingenious and grotesque. Mrs. Dering was putting away her netting, and glancing towards the open window as if she meant to go out. He looked up, saw the glance, and spoke just in time to arrest her—(supposing she were really going.)

“Do you know, Mrs. Dering, I am very sorry for all this?”

“Thank you, dear Mr. Keating—I was sure you would be!”

“And it seems all my fault too?”

“Not at all—not the least! you must not think that for a moment!—In a country neighbourhood you know one’s every action is known and commented on. The fault, if there be any, is mine only.”

Again Mr. Keating began his scroll promenade.

“Georgina—Miss Dering—is an exquisite

musician," said he at last—"to you I do not mind saying so, but if I said it to herself she might neglect her practice and think she was perfect—no, she is really a beautiful songstress, and her touch on the piano is the finest I ever heard, but she is very young, and has still much to learn. I have often told her so, and I fear sometimes I have wounded her feelings by my candour—I am sorry for it now!"

Mrs. Dering assured him that Georgy had been more obliged to him than wounded—that she had always taken his correction in good part, and tried to profit by it.

"Yes, I know she she has—which speaks volumes for her good temper," said Mr. Keating *Sotto voce*, "and when you are gone I do not know what I shall do, for actually, Mrs. Dering," he added emphatically, "the education of the young girls in this neighbourhood, has been so shamefully neglected that there is not one of them whom I could ever endure to accompany

me, or with whom I would even attempt a duet!"

That evening the Keatings had a dinner-party—one of those overgrown assemblages of people who came six and eight miles by broad daylight in full dress, to be made uncomfortable, and keep up their "society." It was to be a large party, for the Keatings had asked many more than usual, in order to allow for excuses, and yet still fill their dinner table; but, as it happened, the fame of Georgy's singing seemed to have spread abroad, and nobody excused themselves; consequently, a great number of the very individuals who had been the cause of Mrs. Dering's conversation with Mr. Keating, were assembled or assembling, when that lady and her daughters entered the drawing room.

Mrs. Dering had not been exaggerating to her usual extent, when she told him that remarks had been made—she had in a measure spoken the truth; and when Mr. Keating himself

came down, he saw those who had been talking to Georgy on his entrance, move cautiously away. When dinner was announced, no one seemed inclined to offer her an arm, and he accordingly offered his own. In the evening, when he was asked to sing, all eyes instinctively glanced at Georgy, and not a soul ventured to volunteer to accompany him whilst she was in the room!

Until this evening he had not noticed these things, but now he darted indignant looks from side to side, and was more out of temper with her voice than ever.

"Bear with it this once," whispered Georgy at last, as she bent over some music, "I shall not try your patience much longer, and when I am gone I hope you may find some one to endure your criticism as stoically as you have endured my false notes."

He was silenced--he even meditated something like an apology, but she was in the midst of a solo, with breathless silence all round her, before

he could resolve what to say, for he began to fear he was in danger, and had rather an idea Mrs. Dering was trying to "hook him," (which was the precise expression ever uppermost in his mind.)

This feeling rendered him cautious, and the conversation of the morning had made him shy. Georgina was also reserved; in short the harmony of the evening was greatly injured, and the party did not go off as well as it might have done. The Major was tired, and thought his son might have exerted himself more, and every one, except the imperturbable Mrs. Dering, had something to grumble about, for a few of the officers of the —th, quartered at Dorchester, had been invited, but Mr. (now Captain) Sydenham, had not been included in the number.

That party was an eventful one though, as far as regarded Georgina and Mr. Keating. It had opened his eyes, and Mrs. Dering saw that it had, but she also saw that his mind was very

far from being made up, and so resolved was she that if *he* chose to procrastinate, *she* would endeavour to punish, that from that evening every hour of her residence beneath that roof was devoted to the accomplishment of her project.

Her position in the house also rendered it necessary that she should use despatch in whatever she intended, for the old couple were evidently waiting to see whether she meant to go or to stay, and they were accustomed to have such a constant succession of guests that she knew she could not in conscience keep them long in suspense; consequently, the morning after the party, she began looking over Georgina's music and separating it from Mr. Keating's, and it was thus that he himself found her employed, Georgy having gone out in the grounds with her sister, a very unusual measure on her part, and one which did not fail to strike Mr. Keating, though he said nothing.

For some moments he watched Mrs. Dering in silence, and then said almost mechanically that he was really very sorry they were going. The widow replied that she was equally so herself, but hoped Mr. Keating had seen, the preceding evening, that she had not taken groundless alarm.

But Mr. Keating was now in so bad a temper that he would not acknowledge this; on the contrary, he declared that the conduct of the guests of the preceding evening was nothing more than homage to Georgina's skill, and that if that were the reason of Mrs. Dering's departure he thought it an insufficient one.

The opening was too tempting for the mother to miss—for an instant she fixed her eyes on him as if to see if he would wither beneath that basilisk glance, but he stood his ground, so turning gracefully away, whilst she spoke in as severe a tone as her voice would assume, she said,

“Then in that case, Mr. Keating, I have

only to consult *the peace of my daughter's mind*," and walked into the back drawing-room.

There is something not altogether displeasing to a trifler in being accused of endangering a "peace of mind." Mr. Keating's vanity was more flattered by the charge than conscience-stricken at the home-thrust. He followed his tormenter with his eyes—he essayed to speak, and sentence after sentence was dismissed from his lips when on the point of utterance, as unsuited to the exigency of the moment. The chaos of his ideas was so great that he could only feel he was on the brink of the abyss, and down he must jump, impelled by a power which it was vain to resist. To take the leap like Marcus Curtius, gloriously, was however the feeling uppermost in his mind, and abruptly following Mrs. Dering, he spoke the fatal words—

"Mrs. Dering—Georgy and I must settle this between ourselves."

That evening they were engaged—Georgina

was the accepted daughter of the house, and Mrs. Dering's anxious heart had only now to beat for Theresa!—Theresa, who, whilst her mother's eye had been sealed on her sister, had been playing her own game, and doing her best to mar every plan and plot laid out for a triumphant destiny!

CHAPTER IX.

AND yet, to Theresa, how swift the time had past! how bright the hours had been! unwatched, unlectured, almost unthought of, she had risen at daybreak each summer's day and flown into the broad parks and shady lanes of Major Keating's beautiful domain; punctual to the hours when the family usually assembled together, her absence in the intervals was hardly observed, for a book and a pencil were always her companions.

But Theresa Dering had another companion

in the summer solitudes—she was not one to care for “wandering by moonlight alone”—by the streams were green banks, and the lanes and woods had many a pleasant resting place, and there, as each bright day succeeded the other, by her side was a living, walking and talking companion; in the shadiest spots of different parts of the road too, might be seen occasionally a horse led by a mounted groom, patiently pacing up and down, waiting for the lingering rider.

Dorchester was but seven miles from Major Keating's; to gallop across the by-roads, and wait at a certain wicket, from whence the beautiful Theresa would issue at stated times, was pleasant pastime for Captain Sydenham, and the acquaintance which till now had been little else than a rather serious flirtation to Theresa, now began to assume a deeper character, and the earnestness of Captain Sydenham's attachment began at last to be shared by herself!

Naturally cold, and rendered by education calculating, Captain Sydenham's circumstances had, till now, been a shield to the vulnerable part of Theresa's heart ;—she had been brought up in poverty—reared both to despise and conceal it, consequently the ceaseless struggle “to keep up appearances” as it is called, had generated in her mind, one firm and desperate determination to marry well, or not at all ! But this day was passing, and another was dawning for her, too bright, too happy for one so young to resist. Captain Sydenham saw that her heart was won at last, and she was evidently expecting every time they met that the truth would come out, and the words would be spoken, for no sooner was the smallest approach to a declaration made than an indefinable dread came over her, and old reproaches, old cautions, words till then forgotten and tones of harsh unkindness, rang in her ears again, and led her to turn the conversation, or suddenly to put an end to it altogether. These interviews had hitherto been alone, but on the

day of Mrs. Dering's tête-à-tête with Mr. Keating, Georgina had accompanied her sister; unaccustomed, however, to activity, she soon grew weary, and sat down, but Theresa wandered on by the river's bank, until through the trees, the glancing of a shadow told her who was advancing.

That day in particular, a feeling and an impulse, hitherto unknown, flashed across Theresa—it was, to turn back; and then her feet seemed glued to the ground—stronger and stronger grew the impulse, yet it appeared to her as though something detained her, and she stood still in this frame of mind, concealed by a tree, and watched him breaking through the brushwood, and descending the bank which sloped to the water's edge.

As he came nearer, she saw him look anxiously round for her in every direction, and then stop—she could not move—but her eyes were on his face—she gazed on the well known features and they carried her back to bygone days,

now grown precious in her sight—her heart swelled, and hiding her face in her hands she inwardly breathed a fervent wish that he might pass without observing her, and that so she might escape.

But it was not to be so. One hasty spring down the bank and he was by her side, her hands in his and the usual rapid, fervent greeting filling her ear.

Why the sensations of this day were so different to those of others, she could not tell;—she could not account for the tremor and the dread with which this meeting was tinged, until, on looking up at him, she suddenly saw that something was wrong—his whole face seemed changed—it hardly seemed the same that she had been watching through the trees, and then a conviction stole over her that her feelings were the foreshadowings of some dreadful announcement, and unable to imagine what could possibly have happened, she sat

down in silence, and looked the enquiries which her lips could not frame.

At her feet knelt Captain Sydenham, her hands still clasped in his, and his eyes still rivetted on those beautiful and trembling features.

“Theresa,” said he, in a voice as changed as his expression—“Theresa, then the news has reached you?”

She shook her head quickly, and the nervous grasp of her hands tightened on his.

“Then you guess it—you feel that the moment has arrived—you know without words what must be the worst news for us, that tongue can tell. Oh! Theresa, speak!—utter but one syllable,” he added with increasing rapidity—“all, all is in your hands; to make me happy above the happiest, or to say, that this partingmust be for ever!”

Her head had sunk on her breast—her lips quivered, and slowly from the long dark eye-lashes there slid tear after tear. She had been

convinced before he spoke that a doom of some kind awaited her ; and yet, like death, when the blow came, how sudden, how stunning it was.

No one knew better than Captain Sydenham the character of Mrs. Dering, therefore throughout his acquaintance, and from the earliest date of his love for Theresa, he was prepared to hope for nothing from her mother. During the last few weeks he had ceased to regard Theresa as her daughter—she had lost her cold manner—the veil of worldliness had dropt from her, and he saw her now only as one, most beautiful, most worthy to be won !

Long and long did that meeting last—many and many a heartfelt, sincere, and passionate sentence was poured into the young girl's ear, and the hours seemed moments as they sat there side by side on the river's brink.

The bitter news that had thus curtailed their happiness and blighted their summer days was the fact of Captain Sydenham's regiment

being ordered to India; and as all hope was destroyed that Mrs. Dering would consent to such a destiny for her child, even were other circumstances propitious, the suit he had come to urge that day was this—that Theresa should fly with him!

It was now that Theresa felt that she had been living in a dream; she had been sailing down the streamlet, never thinking of the future, never caring how it would all end. She only knew they must some day leave the Keatings', but then she thought they would be sure to meet again, either in town or country. India had never for an instant crossed her mind and she was struck dumb!

The grief of the first hour was succeeded by one of reflection, or rather of a hurried glance at the reality of her position;—her mother's anger and indignation—her lover's want of worldly wealth—her own self, spoiled and pampered as she had been, travelling over a distant, dreaded land, in the steps of a regi-

ment, and encountering, as a married woman, the horrors of poverty (or at least a narrow income,) without her mother's power of living in friend's houses when her own resources failed, and thus making her "small means" interesting.

Thoughts such as these were now warring against the real, deep affection which she felt for Captain Sydenham. Theresa had been taught as a child *to think*, and she had occasionally been compelled to learn the bitter lesson of self-denial—thus she was enabled to view her prospects with a clearer eye and a more prudent judgment than most young girls of her age. She knew that her mother had managed that they should cut a good figure in society, but she also knew all that it had cost! The petty humiliations, the compulsory meannesses, the gnawing heart-burnings, and the fifty thousand ways and means known only to "quality paupers!" Thoughts such as these chilled the glowing happiness with which

she had listened to a declaration from the only lips from which she ever wished to hear one. The impossibility of their union, the impossibility of her flying with him too, a measure against which her better nature revolted as one which might one day perhaps, lower her in the eyes of him she loved—all this struck her forcibly, and with floods of tears gushing from her eyes, and in language all the more touching from its broken incoherence, she pronounced her determination to part rather than to fly with him. But Captain Sydenham was not to be easily discouraged; he did not consider the refusal as aught but the first shrinking from a proposition naturally startling, and he urged it with a perseverance which at last perplexed Theresa and induced her to waver. He saw his advantage, and hastily showed her how easily the flight could be arranged—how very easily, whilst Mrs. Dering's watchfulness was slumbering, three hours of safety could be

depended upon, and in three hours they might be far beyond all danger.

Still Theresa wavered! she had not enough of romance in her nature to see the peculiar attraction which "running away" appears to hold in the eyes of many—and besides this, she was unromantic enough to bear in mind, in the midst of vows and protestations, that to live on little else, but love alone, was a wretched prospect—but still it was dreadful to have to tell him so.

"No—I see that we must part!" she at last said; "I did not think it ever could have come to this; but I have more moral courage than you give me credit for. I had rather part from you than lose your respect."

The usual energetic enquiries as to how that could be possible, followed.

"How could you lose my respect by consenting to an act, which would only prove that you really care for me?"

"All men argue thus!" returned Theresa;

“you know that if mamma would but smile on us as she does on the tame love-making of Georgy and Mr. Keating, I would gladly place my destiny in your hands, and follow you all over the world—but she will not—she never will! and for myself—I confess the idea of flying with you—of running away!—of feeling by and bye when you introduce your wife to your friends and brother officers, that she had stolen clandestinely from her home... Oh! Edward, do not urge me; you know in your heart that it is wrong, so spare me the anguish of denying anything you ask—we must part, but not to-day—it is time for me to go home—Georgy is waiting too, so only tell me what hour you will be here to-morrow?”

“One promise before we say good-bye—one easy to grant, Theresa,” said Captain Sydenham—“only promise me that you will *think* of what I have said—turn it over and over in your mind, and let me have your final answer to-morrow; forget that you have said ‘No’ to-day, and let to-morrow decide my fate.”

“ May I consult Georgy ?” asked Theresa.

“ By all means—do,” was the unhesitating answer ; “ she is my friend, and I know what *she* will say !”

“ You think she will say I am wrong ?”

“ I am certain of it !—she will say, ensure your own happiness, before it is wrested from you.”

Theresa looked down in silence for several minutes—the tempter was gaining ground ; then suddenly springing up, she bade him farewell. “ To-morrow,” said she, “ you shall hear the answer—to-morrow I shall have decided—if my hesitation has wounded you forgive me !—to-morrow,” she added with a sunny smile gleaming through her tears, “ at this hour we shall meet again.”

But for them, that morrow was never to arrive ; there, where they parted as if for a few brief hours, they parted for months, and as Theresa’s light figure darted along the path till a sudden curve of the river hid it from his sight

Captain Sydenham's heart sank and he turned despondingly away.

To the spot where she had left her sister, Theresa flew as fast as ever she could run, but Georgy was not there: tired with waiting till the sun had, in its course, robbed that river path of its shade, and made it broiling, she had sauntered on towards home, and on entering the grounds, the first object she saw was Mr. Keating, just emancipated from his *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Dering.

To return for her sister was now impossible, and when Mr. Keating's motive for seeking her society was divulged, she had no inclination to prolong her walk.

Georgy was pleased at his proposal; — quietly happy that he had chosen her, for no one, she knew, suited her so well as a companion, and when he told her that he was sanctioned by her mother, she felt quite safe in accepting him, and satisfied that she was doing very well for herself.

How different her calm complacency, to the agitated, flushed and bewildered state of Theresa when she returned! how different Georgina's prospect of the future! Yet startled from her private thoughts by the incoherent volubility of Theresa, for a time she forgot herself, and gave herself up to earnest endeavours for the peace and happiness of her sister.

The scheme suggested by Captain Sydenham did not meet the cordial approval prophesied by him;—Georgy hesitated almost as much as her sister had done, for she could not see at a glance how Theresa could ever escape without observation;—had Mr. Keating's proposal been but a day later, all might have been arranged, but now, particularly during the first few hours of her engagement, Mrs. Dering would shut her eyes and ears upon Georgy, and open them wide upon Theresa;—Cerberus would be in full force again, for there would be no longer any necessity to mount guard over the musical pair, and they would from henceforth

be at perfect liberty to quarrel over **their** duetts, (which was the fashion of their courtship) to their hearts' content.

It was not as if Mrs. Dering's vigilance could ever slumber---it could not! it must either be on the alert for one daughter or the other, and now, Georgina innocently stood a shadow in the sunshine of her ill-starred sister!

"What agreement have you made?--what are you to do?" asked Georgy at last, "how do you propose arranging the flight, or letting him know if you make up your mind against it?"

"To-morrow morning at the same hour as to-day, we are to meet in the same spot," said Theresa, "and then all will be settled: he says he can smooth every difficulty."

"Of course!" returned Georgy, "he is bound to say so--*his* difficulties compared to yours are very few; he has nothing to provide but money and post horses, but you, Theresa! you have your clothes to pack, your luggage

to convey, the eyes of our mother to close, and the park walls to scale! It sounds romantic, but how you are to do it, is a serious reality which requires some reflection. In the first place, Mamma will take a little air and exercise to-morrow most likely, a treat which she has never had, since the first moment when she thought Mr. Keating meant anything; it stands to reason *I* shall not be her companion."

"But I will slip away before I am missed—I will come up here, and if, by luncheon, I do not return...you will guess, Georgy..."

"You *must* return," said her sister emphatically, "you cannot take flight in such a costume as that!—with nothing but your shawl and bonnet, Theresa? what nonsense!"

"But if I carry my luggage (as you call it) with me, he will see my mind is made up to go with him, and I do not wish that; I merely wish to hear what he has to say—to see if we could really manage to exist, if I were to resolve to marry him."

“Judge of that here, at home then,” expostulated the wiser sister, “you know his income;—calculate the possibility of living on it, before you take such a step as meeting him for that purpose; one would think you were foolish! Of course if you meet him, he will persuade you that it is ample.—If you meet him to-morrow, you will be Mrs. Sydenham this day week to a certainty.”

“But would you have me *not* go then?”

“Not unless you are resolved; if you mean to take him, go, and we must manage about your wardrobe as we can!”

Midnight approached, and the lids of each young sister were sealed in sleep, before either had come to any decision as to what was to be done on the following day. Georgina reasoned till she talked herself to sleep, and in course of time, Theresa’s weary eyes were also weighed down, for each knew that till the morning no decisive measure could be adopted, yet each at the same time felt that an insensible resolution

had been made by both—that by the younger was to fly, and that by the elder, to aid and abet by every means in her power!

The morrow dawned—that morrow on which the destiny of Theresa was to be decided. It rose bright and sunny like its predecessors, and as she sat at breakfast gazing on the wide and beautiful prospect, gazing, till she was nearly blinded, on the river which swept the lawn, and then wound its glittering way through the trees, sparkling for miles and miles like molten silver, a sickening chill at the recollection of all she was about to undertake, stole over her.

One by one the family had assembled at breakfast—one by one had they risen--all had assembled at prayers, and all after prayers had gathered together in the hall to witness the opening of the post bag, which Major Keating allowed no one to touch till the moment when he judged fit to open it himself—and then came the time chosen by Theresa to slip noiselessly away to her room, and hastily throw on her shawl and

bonnet.—Georgina was already there, longing to see if her sister would escape, and hurried words were passing between them—Theresa entreating Georgy to collect all her little worldly treasure, *in case* she should be overpersuaded, when suddenly a swift step ascended the staircase, and their mother's voice, demanding admittance, was heard at the door.

She entered, her face beaming with pleasure, an open letter in her hand, and on her lips some song of triumph, which her looks plainly said, was dedicated to her beautiful and still unappropriated daughter.

A few words told the tale—her reasons for being so charmed she kept to herself, but she saw no harm in feeling sensibly the kindness of those with whom, though “out of sight” she was not “out of mind,” and therefore it was that she turned to Theresa, and placing the letter in her hand with a radiant countenance, begged her to read it.

It was an invitation from Mrs. Chetwode

that she should pass a month with her at Tunbridge Wells !

Theresa turned deadly pale, but she did not dare look at her sister ; her mother spoke, and went on speaking, for she heard her voice ringing continuously in her ear, but the purport of her words was lost upon Theresa—she only felt that every instant of her mother's stay in the room, was keeping her from her appointment. Georgy's warning eye, fixed steadily on her, told her how necessary it was she should preserve her self-command ; but when the loud clock on the staircase chimed one full hour beyond that appointed for the meeting, and Theresa heard her mother still dilating on her sister's happy prospects, and her own plans for the future, she sank despairingly into a chair, and felt that circumstances and fate had decided her destiny, and that she was herself too dis-spirited and heart-sick to combat the point any longer.

Her mind was at last made up—she saw

that the invitation to Tunbridge Wells was to be accepted, and she knew as well as her mother, to what it would lead; her consent on this head was not even asked, and all that now perplexed her was, by what means to convey to Captain Sydenham, the tidings of her final determination.

CHAPTER X.

Mrs. Dering had left the room—the sisters were alone, and never perhaps in one short hour could a greater change have taken place in any mind than had come over each of theirs since her first application for admittance.

Theresa was the first to speak. “The worst is over,” were her first words, “he has kept his appointment—he has waited for me, too, and I have failed him! It is no use going now, for I should be nearly two hours over the time—Georgy, advise me!”

“It is no use going,” said Georgy, “and you should be thankful that through no agency of your own, you have failed him! You have nothing to accuse yourself of, and now you have but one course left to pursue.”

“I see it,” said Theresa hastily; “but I do not wish you to point it out—I cannot bear it told in words, it is bad enough to feel it; and yet, how unfairly I have behaved!—how shamefully I have deceived him!—and for what?—for the shadow in the water!—for the mere chance of becoming the rich Mrs. Chetwode—Mark Chetwode’s wife!” she added with a scornful laugh—“and for this bliss I resign Edward Sydenham!”

“I often think of what mamma so often says,” murmured Georgy, as she twisted the letter in her hands, “that a married woman finds poverty harder to bear, than a single woman can. I had rather be a poor old maid, than marry to be pinched to the end of my days. Thank Heaven, my poverty days are nearly

over though! Oh! Theresa, do not throw this chance away! — you and I have both learnt wisdom in the same school; surely you cannot feel you are making any enormous sacrifice?”

“A greater perhaps than you think,” returned Theresa, “but I am not so foolish as to imagine I am doing more than any one ever did before; my home is wretched—it will be unbearable when you are gone. I hate this artificial life, and one way or the other I am resolved to put an end to it, so now, all I want to know is, how am I to let him know?”

It seemed tacitly resolved between the sisters that Captain Sydenham was to be rejected, and the contemplated flight given up; both conversed and planned under this conviction, and it was also evident that Theresa did not mean to see him again, though she did not say so—she had strength of mind and purpose to resign him, but no courage, no voice, to talk of it, and she walked to her desk, and placed

herself there, as though to show Georgy more by actions than words, what she was about to do.

Georgy stood gazing out of the window whilst Theresa sat writing—she never looked towards her once during the whole time that the pen traced its rapid way over the sheet, nor did she move till she heard the desk closed again.

What was in that letter was not to be shown—the farewell that it breathed was between two only, and except that the bright colour had entirely left Theresa's cheeks, there was no sign of emotion or feeling of any kind, when she advanced to her sister, and holding it towards her, said,

“Now advise—how are we to place this in his hands before to-night?”

It was indeed an enterprise of some difficulty, and one in which Georgina did not at all like being engaged. Mr. Keating would now be so very *exigeant* of her society, that she

did not see how she could ever steal sufficient time to go down alone to the river walk, on the chance of encountering Captain Sydenham; besides, in addition to Mr. Keating's multiplicity of characters and qualifications, he added that of being the most suspicious of his sex, and if he ever discovered a mysterious letter in her possession, Georgy knew it would be death to her prospects.

"I can see but one way," she said hesitatingly, "and that is, to send it to Dorchester at once."

"But how?" asked Theresa, "who dare we trust?"

For a moment Georgina paused, and then answered in a low voice,

"Why not Victor?"

Each knew that Victor might be trusted; each had had girlish whims, and exchanges of trinkets, and anonymous bouquets, and small intricate notes, and cleverly-worded messages entrusted to "that treasure of a man," but nothing so serious as the present embassy had

ever been given to his charge, and each shrank from it. Supposing, however, that they did let him convey the letter, what would Mrs. Dering say if she missed him?—what would Victor say himself?—What possible excuse could he make for going to Dorchester, and what would be the consequence, if his mission should be discovered?

Neither of those young heads reflected on the consequences of letting him into the secret of a clandestine correspondence with Captain Sydenham!—they thought only of the chances of detection as far as their mother was concerned—as for Victor, he was nobody.

Next came the query, who should give the letter?—who should summon him?—where should they speak to him?—what should be said to him, and it ended by Georgy's calling him herself; and desiring him to take a tumbler of water and Miss Theresa's colours into the conservatory.

By the side of a superb cactus just blowing

stood Theresa, her back towards the door by which Victor entered—a door at the further end opened on to the lawn, and as he entered by one, the airy figure of Mrs. Dering approached by the other! There was not a moment to lose, and Theresa turned abruptly round; from the outstretched hands of Victor she took the tumbler and the colour-box, and as she did so, the letter was slid from her own hand a little beyond the edge of the box—the quick eye of Victor caught sight of the action and the missive at the same instant, and his ear, the half uttered words, “*yourself*, remember,” and passing towards a seat, he stooped and deposited the box on it—when he raised himself again no letter was in his hand—it was safe! it was over! and the secret? how fared it? but of that Theresa thought not—the deed was done, and a weight, heavy beyond endurance, was lifted from her mind, and she breathed freely.

The amiability of Mrs. Dering now knew

no bounds ; all her happiness seemed to come at once, and the intended departure of a certain regiment for India was not an inconsiderable cause of satisfaction to her.

At last the P.P.C. cards of the different officers who had partaken of the hospitalities of that house were left, and Major Keating tossed them over one day after dinner.

“ Very odd,” said he, as he seemed engaged in some fruitless search, “ very odd they are all here but one—surely we asked him to dinner, and yet his card is not here—who has seen Captain Sydenham’s card ?”

“ No one,” answered Mr. Keating, “ for he went away suddenly a fortnight ago ; I was told he was called up to town on business.”

And that was all that Theresa ever heard—she thought her letter must have been delivered, and that was all she ever knew of the result ; from that moment her heart closed over the silent

name—in future what was that name to be to her?

In the meantime, though Georgina's marriage was not to take place till the autumn, preliminaries had begun, and plans were being projected every day. Mr. Keating was not like most lovers—he never dreamt of giving way to any wish of Georgina's, nor of asking if she had any particular fancies as to where their honeymoon should be passed. He had arranged that they should go to Paris immediately, and as Georgina looked upon Paris as a home, she was very well pleased to agree to the arrangement.

In fact she was passive upon every point, and exerted herself to please both her future husband and family as much as possible. The head that thought for her, reasoned for her, and planned for her, was her mother's.

Mrs. Dering made no show of providing a handsome trousseau for her child—two or three dresses, the wedding one amongst them,

were all that she intended to order—the future appearance of the future Mrs. Keating was on her husband's responsibility—not hers.

But that wily widow had a project in her head which had smouldered there till she could keep it no longer, and Georgy was at last let into it—the subject was Victor, that “treasure of a man.”

Mrs. Dering now saw visions of both her daughters well settled in life—both well married, and able to keep up excellent establishments—she also saw a vision of herself living first at one house and then at the other, but for Victor she saw no abiding place unless she pensioned him off upon either the future Mrs. Keating or the future Mrs. Chetwode.

The former appeared to her the happiest lot for him, for Mr. Keating's love of travelling would naturally lead him to lands where the peculiar talents of Victor might make him an acquisition. As for herself, she should have no need of his services, but still he had been so

valuable a servant to her for years and years, ~~that~~ she should feel much more comfortable if he were domiciled in some house where she was likely to stay some time!

On this head the bride-elect was admonished daily, and she readily promised to speak to Mr. Keating on the subject.

To her unbounded but silent surprise, however, Mr. Keating negatived the proposition in the most decided manner—he made not even a semblance of tolerating it, and the short, contemptuous laugh with which he said he would not deprive Mrs Dering of so valuable a domestic, fell with a peculiarly disagreeable intonation on the ear of his *fiancée*.

“ But mamma’s offer was quite voluntary,” said Georgina, hardly comprehending his manner ; “ I did not say a word about your wanting a valet.”

“ I never suspected you,” was Mr. Keating’s reply ; “ and though I am equally obliged to your mother, I had rather have no dealings

with Monsieur Victor ; he is a monstrous deal too sharp a fellow for me !”

“ I always thought you liked him—and he is such an invaluable servant.”

“ Doubtless—therefore I will not rob Mrs. Dering of him ; I do not require an invaluable servant, nor even a valuable one—I had a valuable valet once, who stole everything I had, and went away, worth much more than when he came ; so now I am independent.”

“ But we shall want a courier, shall we not ?”

“ Yes, certainly.”

“ Victor was always our courier—it is his proper sphere.”

“ My dear Georgina !” exclaimed Mr. Keating, getting rather impatient at her perseverance, “ since you press me so very hard I will do what I very seldom do, and that is, give you my reasons ;—come with me into the conservatory a minute—now look here—a fortnight or three weeks ago, I was one day smoking on the lawn there, just outside that cluster of

cactus trees—a very beautiful figure came and stood by that largest plant for some time, and in her hand, half concealed, was a sealed letter; I watched her, and before many minutes had elapsed, your friend Victor entered at that door, at the very moment that your mother entered at that, and in his hand was placed, with an adroitness which would have done credit to any practitioner of sleight of hand, that sealed letter;—I saw it given—I saw it concealed—I saw it borne from this house and these grounds, when the household were all at rest; now, my dear Georgy, I blame nobody—but the ingenuity that invaluable servant exerted that day to deceive his mistress, and the able manner in which he succeeded, leads me to suspect he would not scruple in playing the same game, if he had a master to deal with instead of a mistress—you need not colour so, Georgy—young ladies will have their lovers—some authorised, some not—and

as I said before, I blame the lady far less than the man."

"Did you suspect," began Georgina, "to whom that letter was sent?"

"I knew!" returned Mr. Keating, triumphantly; "you do not suppose I had no eyes?—no eyes to see what has been going on for years! but it was no business of mine—never tell me any secrets, Georgy—I dislike them; but what I choose to know, I find out for myself."

After this, it was impossible to urge the subject;—Georgina told her mother that Mr. Keating did not require Victor, and Mrs. Dering saw that he had given some reason which was not to be imparted, which rather made her doubt his tractibility; but as there was no remedy, she was silent, only resolving, however, in her own mind, that if one son-in-law proved refractory, she would take all the better care that the other should not, provided he were the one on whom she had secretly fixed.

And now was the moment when Theresa was to proceed on her visit to the Chetwodes.

The day of departure from the Keatings had arrived, and the last maternal lecture had been given. Theresa knew exactly all she had to do, and as the dangerous regiment had actually sailed for India Mrs. Dering felt some confidence in her obedience.

In the letter accepting Mrs. Chetwode's invitation, Mrs Dering had petitioned to be allowed to sleep in the empty house in Hill-street, before consigning Theresa and the maid to the Tunbridge Wells coach. Such a request could not have been refused, but it might have been ungraciously complied with, however it met with neither reception; Mrs. Chetwode never did anything by halves—her hospitality was always offered with an open hand, not doled out in portions, so the reply to Mrs. Dering was: "the house contains only an old woman who can, I hope, cook you a mutton chop—enter therefore, and consider yourself at home."

What could be more kind ? more delightful ? or more tempting to an individual possessed of Mrs. Dering's propensities ? She immediately told the Keatings that whilst Theresa was to be at Tunbridge Wells, Mrs. Chetwode had placed her town house at the disposal of herself and Georgina, and that she should thus have a good opportunity of superintending the trousseau herself—for, notwithstanding Mrs. Dering's "small means," Theresa and Georgy were always dressed to perfection, and employed only French milliners.

When the widow wrote back her warm acknowledgments for the enormous kindness and convenience the generous offer would be to her, Mrs. Chetwode was a little staggered, for she had never dreamt of the house being taken *vi et armis* in that manner ! She intended to return to it before Christmas, leaving time for its being thoroughly purified after the process of painting which it was about to undergo. She had invited Theresa for a month, and

intended keeping her longer perhaps, but if Mrs. Dering were to be in Hill Street all the time of her daughter's visit, how was the painting and papering ever to be achieved? The old lady was fairly puzzled, and perhaps in her heart she was a little vexed, but this feeling she studiously concealed, from motives which the future will elucidate.

What to do, she knew not; she did not like to say to Mrs. Dering, "at a certain time you must go," for perhaps that certain time might be a most inconvenient season—she had given an inch in fact, and it only remained for her to give the ell with a good grace, otherwise in all probability it would be taken, which would not be so pleasant; she therefore allowed her early friend to imagine she had had the offer of the house for an unlimited period, and tried to forget how much it would upset all her own plans.

Whilst in this benevolent humour, another letter from Mrs. Dering arrived. Circum-

stances, she said, since the former one, had induced Mr. Keating to petition for the wedding a month earlier than it had been originally intended;—would Mrs. Chetwode think her most encroaching and impertinent, if she entreated to be allowed to go quietly to church from Hill Street? and if she asked as a favour that Theresa might be permitted to make one at her sister's humble, unostentatious wedding?—for that purpose to run up to town, to return to Mrs. Chetwode's kind care, if dear Mrs. Chetwode had not got tired of her?

To all this, what reply could poor Mrs. Chetwode make?—there are some people who ask what the most grudging cannot refuse, and Mrs. Chetwode did not know how to grudge—consequently all was granted, and Mrs. Dering was on the pinnacle of extreme delight; expectations, exceeding her most sanguine, had been more than realized, and she revelled in triumphs. What cared she now for the cold looks of jealous mothers of eligible sons, or

the contemptuous smiles of eclipsed daughters? She was about to marry one of hers to an excellent match—not quietly, down in the country—but brilliantly, from a house in town, a house in Hill Street, Berkeley Square, and the struggles of her past life (if not *for fame, for fortune*) were now all amply repaid and almost forgotten.

Certainly, now and then Mr. Keating gaye her a little uneasiness, but then she recollected that it was “his way,” and she overlooked his rebellion.

Mrs. Dering was inured to having cold water occasionally sprinkled over her, but her future son-in-law dashed it down in so unceremonious a manner, that, as in the case of Victor, it rather chilled her advances. He would no longer suffer her to interfere between Georgina and himself; he looked upon Georgina as his own property, and he did not consider it at all too soon to show Mrs. Dering, that he would tolerate no long secret confe-

rences in which he was not to be included ; in short, before the widow departed for Hill Street she saw that her absolute reign had ended—the day of her dominion was over, and that although in the eyes of the world she had married her daughter and gained a son-in-law, as far as her own advantage was concerned, she had lost her daughter for ever ; in future Georgina would not be Miss Dering — she would be Mrs. Francis Keating, to all intents and purposes.

CHAPTER XI.

WHILST the Derings were pursuing their career with such marked success, things had been gradually drawing nearer and nearer to a crisis in Hill-street.

We left Mark Chetwode in the act of retiring from that interview with his sister, in which he had first told his secret, and from that moment, the love he had avowed, had been deepening in his heart—it seemed as though, having once embodied it in language, his tongue could find no other theme, and at last, wea-

ried with the contradictory task of trying not to wound his feelings, and at the same time endeavouring to avoid having any participation in a deed, which she did not consider likely to ensure his happiness, Marian strongly and steadily advised him to open the subject to his mother, and test, without reserve, her own sentiments regarding it.

Mrs. Chetwode knew that this hour would arrive, yet she felt nervous at its approach; she had always been in the habit of talking of the time when Mark should marry, but she had had no idea what a formidable announcement it would be, when he told her that his choice was made.

Perhaps had Mrs. Bellingham not visited England that season, she might have received it with almost unalloyed pleasure, but now, when Mark one evening drew his arm-chair to her side, and when on looking round, she saw that Marian had left the room, and that the hour was come, it was with regret and pain that

she prepared herself to listen, and with still more that she heard him state so firmly, that he had taken time to consider, and time also to subdue the feeling in case it should be but an evanescent one, but that his efforts were vain—he could not forget Theresa Dering, he could not be happy without her, and—he did not ask his mother's consent, an omission which gave her an unspeakable pang—but he entreated her to tell him, if she could welcome her as a daughter-in-law should be welcomed, if she could receive her with the warmth with which he should wish his wife to be received!

It was now that Mrs. Chetwode felt that she had never wished her son to marry;—it was now that she felt how precious to her had been that first place in his affections which was now occupied by another, and that other a comparative stranger! It was true that she had often talked of his “settling”—she had pictured in her own mind often and often, imaginary wives for him, creatures all perfection, for

whom she was to retire with the best grace in the world, but now that the reality had arrived, how painfully she felt all this had been but a day-dream—nothing but visionings of a far off future! so far off, that she remembered having felt quite annoyed with Theresa herself, for one day speaking in the past tense, and wondering that Mr. Chetwode “*had never married!*” —she remembered also her own answer, “that he had plenty of time before him!” How little she then thought that the time was measured—the days of his bachelorhood numbered.

Mark saw the effect his words had on his mother; he saw that she tried to wish him all happiness from the bottom of her heart, but that a something choked the cordiality of expression, and he knew what it was.

“I know, my dear mother,” said he, “that had I found courage, or that had I felt sufficiently certain of my sentiments, to speak to you thus openly immediately after the departure of Mrs. Dering, that your reception of

Theresa as a future daughter would have been very different ;—I know that slander has been very busy with the name of your early friend, and that in consequence you do not look with an unprejudiced eye on the perfections of the daughter—but remember that as far as Theresa is concerned I believe nothing of what has been said ! no,” he added, with increasing energy, “ I go so far as even to disbelieve what is said of Mrs. Dering herself ! and as for Theresa—I do not judge hastily—I have reflected long and seriously—from the first hour that she attracted me, I watched her narrowly—and from this scrutiny I come, convinced that she is the only being who could make me happy, the being, in fact, without whom, all hope of happiness for me, is at an end !”

That sentence, those last few words alone, were enough of themselves to decide Mrs. Chetwode. The tales, the slander, the remonstrance of Mrs. Bellingham were all forgotten at that moment—the mother was bent only on

sanctioning what was to ensure the happiness of her son—yet it was grievous for her to feel that doing so cost her a pang, when she had often thought to herself, that Mark's marrying would be one of the bright days of her life!

In the warmth of her heart then, the sanction was given, and she made but one reservation.

“I admire your choice, my child—I will welcome her as your second self, and I ask but one favour before you take any decided step, and that is, see a little more of her! know her a little better! I only ask this, that you may make “assurance doubly sure”—she is the first who ever struck your fancy, Mark, and before you propose, it is your duty to her, to yourself, and to me, to be perfectly certain she is all you imagine her to be.”

“I studied her well, mother,” persisted Mark, “I watched her when she never dreamt I was occupied with her—I always resolved that when I married, it should be one whose feelings were fresh and young—unsunned by the world,

—one too who had had no other preference, and in choosing Theresa Dering I believe, most solemnly, that I have found that person.”

Here, however, Mrs. Chetwode could not be silent—her conscience called out loudly for words, and she reminded her son boldly of Mr. Sydenham!

“You remember him, my dear Mark—you cannot have forgotten him?”

But men in love are blind — proverbially blind! blinder than any living thing deprived of sight, and Mark Chetwode actually imagined he was speaking the truth, when he said that he thought Mr. Sydenham’s attentions were very impartial. His mother made a gesture as if to interrupt him, and then he modified the sentence.

“At all events there was no encouragement on Theresa’s part—if Mr. Sydenham chose to pay her attention, it was not her fault—had not his mother told him herself, that Mrs. Dering had repeatedly said, that Theresa had never

known what it was even to have a preference?"

"Yes—certainly Mrs. Dering did say so."

"And you disbelieved her?"

"Not exactly—but Mr. Sydenham was a very fine young man, and Theresa a very beautiful girl. I honestly confess I did not think either was indifferent to the attractions of the other, though Mrs. Dering often assured me to the contrary."

"Her mother must be the best authority," persisted Mr. Chetwode, "and as for what Mrs. Bellingham said about Sir Henry Wharton, I do not believe one syllable of it!"

Mrs. Chetwode said no more—she saw the bent of her son's inclinations, and she had no heart to make the subject one of dispute—she yielded with her usual gentleness—she even smothered every personal feeling, and studied only the best and surest way of forwarding his views. It was with this object that she suggested inviting Theresa to Tunbridge Wells, and thereby giving Mark an opportunity, in

a pleasureable shape, of knowing more of her, before he took that irrevocable step which leads to certain happiness or certain misery, for in marriage there is no medium.

Mark was grateful for the concession, and he tried to think, till he actually succeeded in believing, that his mother cordially approved his choice ! As for Marian, her grieved countenance when she heard how the conversation had terminated, was quite sufficient to prevent his speaking much on the subject to her, and thus the want of confidence in each other grew greater ; the breach originally caused by Theresa, was widened still more on the present occasion, and though the mother, son, and sister still continued to live on the most affectionate terms together, there subsisted amongst them that slight reserve, which was very different, painfully different indeed, to the open and perfect harmony which had characterised the trio for so many years.

Had Mark Chetwode been less loved in his

home, this state of affairs never would have existed. A less devoted mother would have said—"If you marry this girl, it must be without my consent, for she cannot make you happy;—a less attached sister would have argued—"you know what those who know her say of her—all that they say, I believe to be true, for I have been an eye witness of a great many of the faults with which she is charged."

But Mark and his happiness was so dear to them, that from false kindness they tried to see with his eyes and feel with his feelings, and as soon as the letter to Mrs. Dering brought the anxiously expected acceptance, the barrier of reserve was thrown down, and Theresa's name coupled with terms as warm as could be bestowed on any new connexion, in her various relations of daughter, sister, and wife, was constantly on their lips.

Far different was it with Mrs Bellingham when the news was gradually broken to *her*! It had been judged expedient to say nothing

about it until the letter had been sent and the answer received, because they all knew her sentiments on the subject, and felt that if a refusal of the invitation should arrive, the matter would most probably end there, and they should be spared a great deal;—but now that Theresa was actually to be their guest, when Georgy was going to be married from their very house—when Mrs. Bellingham would most likely meet the bride and bridegroom, when she returned to her winter quarters in Paris, and from them hear every or any particular that their own prudence might have tempted the Chetwode's to conceal, they felt the truth must come out, and Mrs. Bellingham was in consequence prepared by a letter from Tunbridge Wells, for what was *just possible* to happen from the invitation in question.

Astonished, dismayed, and disgusted, Mrs. Bellingham's house in town could not hold her an hour after the information had reached London—a journey to Tunbridge Wells, as

fast as post-horses could convey her, was the plan her energetic mind instantly determined on, as the only step likely to avert the dreaded and dreadful alliance, and as she had by long habit so organised her household, that each and all were always ready to start on any journey or voyage at an hour's notice, six hours from the arrival of the post in London, found Mrs. Bellingham seated between Mrs. Chetwode and her son, in a house on mount Ephraim, and Mary Vere walking with Marian, on the common before the windows.

The old lady had wasted no time in compliments on entering that doomed house—the subject that had trembled on her lips, and fallen from them in muttered syllables all the way down to Tunbridge Wells, flowed in one powerful volume of language the instant the opening of the carriage door allowed her to rush into her sister-in-law's presence.

To overpower Mrs. Chetwode was no difficult matter—to talk down Marian also, would

have been an easy task—the former sat silenced, and the latter left the room with Mary Vere, whose countenance during the domestic scene evinced no kind of participation in it, but beamed on the agitated group, placid, smiling, and utterly undisturbed ! but to make any impression on Mark Chetwode, to alarm, rule and order the mind, the will and the affections of a man hopelessly in love, whose love too had had just the necessary quantity of opposition to render it unchangeably obstinate, was an enterprise, which even Mrs. Bellingham soon saw, was beyond her power.

Mark Chetwode did not listen to her unmoved, it is true ;—but it was only his anger that was roused ;—his intentions could as soon have been turned from their object, as a river from its course.

“ My mind is made up,” were his words, in the calm, firm, voice which so exasperated his aunt during their annual discussions ; “ it is decided on a point which admits of no argu-

ment, since I, who marry the subject of your animadversion, am content to look upon myself as the greatest sufferer—in fact the *only* one !”

“ No such thing,” interrupted Mrs. Bellingham ; “ your infatuation blinds you—you delight to think you are to be the happiest victim in the world ! I know you very well, young man, and I see what the end of all this will be.--I told your mother months ago, that he who marries a Dering, marries the mother too !”

“ Then,” said Mr. Chetwode, laughing in spite of his vexation “ Mrs. Dering will spare *me*, for she is already almost married to Mr. Keating, the intended husband of her eldest daughter !”

“ Mr. Keating !” repeated Mrs. Bellingham, contemptuously—“ Mr. Keating, indeed ! if I am not very much mistaken she will find herself considerably out of her element if she tries to rule *him* ! I know him too—a singing man—and mixes in very tolerable society, both in

Town and in Paris—he marries Miss Dering’s voice, of course, because it goes well with his own—but you and Mr. Keating are two very different people, Mark!—I know you better than you know yourself—my speeches may sound rough to you, but I wound to heal—mark my words, if you marry this girl, you are a wretched man!”

“Why so?” retorted Mr. Chetwode, impatiently—“why so, more than Keating?”

“Because,” answered Mrs. Bellingham, her little sharp eyes flashing fire, “you have not his spirit!—there!—fret and fume and be in a rage...”

“Not at all—,” began Mark.

“Yes—be offended if you choose, but I only do my duty in telling you this—the duty that your mother has not courage to fulfil.”

“My dear kind mother!” said Mark, turning towards her, his eyes full of tenderness—
“no—you have not courage to make me un-

happy — it requires a harder heart than yours !”

“ Stuff,” continued Mrs. Bellingham, “ if she had, you would thank her for it—thank her for it as you will some day thank me ; but she has not the spirit—you have none of you any spirit—and on these grounds, Mark Chetwode, I tell you beforehand, you will be a miserable man !”

“ Then as I said before, I shall be the only sufferer,” retorted the nephew.

“ Not so—you will not !—when one member of a family makes a bad match, *all* suffer ! You interrupt me so that I forget half I have to say ; but this I know, that I see through you as plain as I do through that pane of glass ! you glory and delight in feeling that you are sacrificing yourself on the shrine of the girl who has turned your head ! but when the first burst is over—when, like evaporated soda water, you have subsided into the still, sober, insipid state, in which you have lived all the

years of your life—then you will remember all that I have said—my warnings will come back to you like prophecies, and if you are happy, Mark Chetwode—why, then I shall be astonished, that's all."

And the old lady tucked her feet up on a chair, and clasping her hands over her knees (a favourite attitude,) her eyes darted glances from one to the other of her auditors, and she waited to see what effect her harangue had had.

But the effect was not satisfactory ; she had certainly silenced Mrs. Chetwode, but as for Mark, his countenance evinced nothing now but determination, and perhaps Mrs. Bellingham's remark about his mother's having too little spirit to thwart him, contained as much truth as any of the plain truths, which she was in the habit of telling her family so constantly.

To meddle with the affairs, or rather the heart, of a man in love, is a dangerous thing—the nail that might have had but a slender

hold, is often irrevocably clenched thereby, particularly where the offender considers that his accuser has no right to interfere, as in the present case.

Though Mrs. Bellingham, for her own private satisfaction, honour, and glory, chose to continue the combat till the subject was exhausted, had still wit enough to see that no arguments on earth had now power to shake the resolution which she had so manfully attacked—on the contrary, she saw that they did more harm than good, and therefore she determined to return to town the next day.

When she saw that Georgina Dering was to be married from Hill Street, she only smiled sarcastically—in short, the rest of the day she played an altered game, and received every piece of intelligence of plans and prospects, with an air of contemptuous resignation, which rendered her departure next day, an event ardently to be desired.

She asked nothing about Theresa and her

nephew ; he had not proposed yet, and a bright idea struck her, that possibly the young lady might have a will of her own, and that the belle who had had enough of the admiration and adulation of half the stylish young men of the day to turn her head, might actually refuse the unassuming, quiet, and straightforward Mark Chetwode.

This idea improved her temper slightly, but still the chance of the impending disgrace, of the sole representative of the Chetwodes making a bad match, marrying the daughter of the well-known Mrs. Dering, whose domicile in Paris had once been stamped with the name of the Man Trap, always set, but always unsuccessful—this was enough to embitter that summer's evening sadly, and she retired to her room—that room which was the next day to be tenanted by Theresa herself—in a frame of mind which refused all tranquilization.

Mary Vere was in the habit of sitting with the old lady every night till she finally lighted

the night lamp, and put her keys under her pillow, and readings which commenced with a novel and ended with a chapter, served to wile away the time; but on the present occasion Mrs. Bellingham could fix her attention on nothing—she heard the voice of her companion as one hears the murmuring of a stream—it did not either chain or interrupt her thoughts, and as the last words were uttered, she gave vent to her feelings, in the silence that ensued, by a sentence that plainly showed how much that busy brain of hers had been wandering.

“Devil take them!” were her words—“Yes, Mary Vere, I hope I am never unjust and seldom uncharitable, but I must say, devil take them *all!*”

CHAPTER XII.

BEFORE the carriage, which was to convey Mrs. Bellingham away, came to the door, she could not resist having one more shot at her unworthy relatives, Mark in particular, and she asked him, for the last time of asking, if all he had heard, and all she had said, were utterly thrown away upon him?

Mr. Chetwode had no intention of losing his temper, much as it had been tried during the last few hours, therefore his answer was

more calculated to turn away wrath than to provoke further discussion. He begged the old lady to recollect, that he had not even proposed as yet—that there was just a chance that on a nearer acquaintance, obstacles or objections might arise, of which he at the present moment saw no fear—he also requested her to consider, that in the eyes of Mrs. Dering, Theresa's visit was simply to his mother, without a thought or reference to himself; but when he thus expressed himself, Mrs. Bellingham could stand it no longer—she flew out in new invectives, and assured him that Mrs. Dering's eyes were by nature so peculiarly constituted, that there was not an unmarried man on earth, whom she did not regard, as a possible husband for one of her daughters.

That was a theme so disagreeable to Mr. Chetwode that he waived it, and almost hunted down, he told her that the mischief being done, (i.e. the invitation having been given and ac-

cepted) there was now no help for it—things must take their course.

“How like you!” cried his aunt, “how exactly your character!—you would lose a pin because of the trouble of picking it up!—stir yourself for once, Mark Chetwode!—throw aside this weak resignation to what you consider your destiny—my carriage is at the door, the present moment is yours—leave Miss Der-
ing to pay the visit which you say is exclusively to your mother, and come up to town with me! It is said that the woman who deliberates is lost, and so is the man, just as much!—Mark Chetwode, be firm!”

“I am,” returned he calmly, after a pause of a second, “I thank you for your zeal in my cause, my dear Aunt, but I decline your offer; spare me for the present, your reproaches—scold and censure me when I really deserve it!”

“Not so,” retorted the old lady, turning to leave the room, “with this hour ends all my interference, for when the mischief is done, it

will be too late to reprove. I have warned you all, and you have chosen to take your own way, so I wish you good-bye, and only beg you to remember, that if Miss Dering becomes Mrs. Chetwode, I am willing to be introduced to her ;—when the deed is done, I shall consider it a duty to support *your wife* in the eyes of the world.”

And certainly, had Mrs. Bellingham been Atlas himself, she could not have groaned more sincerely under the weight of her responsibility, than she did as she drove away from Tunbridge Wells and felt that her mission had been a signal failure.

Before the fermentation of spirits produced by this impromptu visit had half subsided, the fair cause of it all arrived, and Theresa, in a flutter, something between nervousness and shyness, perhaps consequent on being for the first time, parted from her mother and sister, was kindly and cordially welcomed into the bosom of the family, in which she had been

tacitly given to understand, she was to make three distinct conquests of Mother, Sister, and Son.

That first evening at Tunbridge Wells was one of the strangest quietude to Theresa, for she had come, first from the gay country house of the Keatings, and next from the society of Mrs. Dering, Georgy, and Mr. Keating, in Hill Street, where the preparations for the wedding had commenced with a vehemence which left no soul in the house a moment's peace, and drove the charwoman, who had both to cook and answer the door, nearly out of her mind; for although Victor was one of the party, he was far too busy shopping and hunting out the few of Mrs. Dering's acquaintances who might still be in town, to be of the smallest assistance to the two unhappy females, whose privacy and holiday, had been thus unceremoniously invaded.

Consequently, in the absence of that ceaseless ringing of bells and confusion of tongues,

Theresa felt as though she had grown suddenly deaf, and she retired to her room with the inward conviction, that no being in existence was ever half so inaccessible, so stupid, and so heavy on hand, as the lauded son of her silent gentle hostess.

For hour after hour, at the open window of her pretty, quiet room, did Theresa that evening sit, and watch the sun gradually throwing darker and darker shadows over the beautiful prospect; calmed—one might also add, comforted—by the dreamy silence around her, and thoroughly revelling in her unaccustomed loneliness and liberty, her thoughts took unto themselves wings, and flew back into the few short happy months that had passed, since last she saw the Chetwodes; those months had changed the giddy, worldly girl, into a thinking, feeling woman, and one single day had wrought the change! that one day in which, by an effort so great, that she now looked back with perfect wonder on the strength of mind, with

which she had been momentarily gifted, to effect it, she had made a sacrifice for which no one could ever give her credit, since not even Georgy knew, how deeply round her heart were wound the cords of that first, deep, and secret attachment; and strange as it may seem, there was bitterness in the idea that no one, no, not even *he*, would or could thank her for it, for in the eyes of her mother and sister, her conduct must have been considered as the result of indifference, and in his—she clasped her hands over her eyes, and sighed bitterly as she reflected how base *he* must think her!

But now—it was all gone by; the indecision, the decision, the struggle, and the remorse—no, not the remorse! that could never die!—but all the rest was gone by for ever! and for the first time in her life she felt that in heart and soul, as well as body, she was alone—utterly alone.

Till now Theresa had never had time to think of these things—her life had been

spent in such a whirl of excitement, that she now felt as though the past had been a dream, and the present, her wakening.

But the excitement over, she shuddered as much at the future, as she did at the past. What a blank prospect the vista of years to come presented to her! how could she have been so mad—so heartless? What evil genius could have been at her side in that stunned hour, when, with so little apparent reluctance, she signed away in a few cold, hurried lines, the hope and the happiness of her own, and another's, life?

Had Captain Sydenham not sailed for India—had he not been beyond all reach, and had a thousand persuasive or compulsory Mrs. Derings been keeping guard over her, that evening would have seen Theresa's flight, and her lover's triumph—but as it was, she believed him far away, on the high seas by that time, and she closed her eyes as daylight was just streaking the horizon, with a bitter resolution

to refuse Mr. Chetwode, unless some wonderful change took place in her sentiments towards him.

Well—the first week of the visit passed.

“If I were sent for, to be scrutinized and approved,” thought the beauty to herself, “this does not seem as if I had given satisfaction!”

And really it did appear so, for, slightly influenced by the stormy visit which had so immediately preceded Theresa’s, Mr. Chetwode had shrunk within his shell, and, encased in an armour of shyness, rarely opened his lips, or raised his eyes, to the brilliant being on whom his outward indifference, made so very little impression.

A circumstance, however, trivial in itself, had shortly the power to thaw this superficial ice, and hurry the victims to the verge from which, it seemed, they were both hanging back.

Those who know Tunbridge Wells will be aware, that on Mount Ephraim one may live

completely out of the world, since nothing but the pursuits of business or pleasure need take one down to the gay scene, now yclept the Parade, and once dignified as the Pantiles.

Mrs. Chetwode rarely visited that thronged spot, but one morning, driving by, the enlivening sounds of the band, extracted an exclamation of pleasure from Theresa, and a half murmured wish that she could get out, and listen to it, escaped from her.

The services of Mr. Chetwode were thus put into requisition. His sister and Theresa descended, and soon formed an attentive group amongst the crowd of loungers, until at last some shop attracted their attention, and they went in.

Whilst standing waiting for her companions, Theresa's eyes suddenly fixed themselves on a gentleman at the other end of the shop, to whom she had herself been for some time, an object of examination. The next moment, bows were exchanged, and the mutual utterance of

the words "Is it possible!—you in England?—and here of all places!" fell upon Mark Chetwode's ear, and then a short conversation ensued.

On re-entering the carriage, Theresa told Mrs. Chetwode immediately that she had encountered an acquaintance—a Sir Henry Wharton—(the name instantly struck both her listeners) and as she ran on enumerating the many scenes of gaiety in which they had met abroad, the anecdotes of Mrs. Bellingham recurred vividly to the memory of Mrs. Chetwode and Marian.

"He asked me where I was staying, and if he might call," she pursued, "but I said I was staying with quiet friends, who only came for health and retirement, so that I should not say *At Home*—was I right, dear Mrs. Chetwode?"

Yes—Mrs. Chetwode thought her quite right, and, moreover, she thought within herself, that this frank unembarrassed, sentence, did

not tally particularly well with Mrs. Bellingham's assertions, that both mother and daughter had done their utmost to entrap the individual in question.

Before Mr. Chetwode left the Parade that morning, after seeing the carriage disappear in the distance, he made himself acquainted with the name of the friend who had accosted Theresa so joyfully, and was no less struck by it than his mother and sister had been, except that to him it was a sound of danger, which had not had the advantage of Theresa's candid explanation.

When he reached home, he found his mother alone, and instantly opened the subject.

"This is the opportunity," said he, "for ascertaining whether my Aunt Bellingham has been mis-informed or not—if Theresa come out of *this* flame unscathed, she is guiltless of all that is imputed to her! I consider this meeting as the most fortunate thing that could have happened."

What a pity it was, that the Chetwodes had not been closeted with the fair Theresa at post time that day! when, in her mother's daily despatch was penned the following sentence:—

“The Whartons I hear are at Tunbridge Wells—remember that you can play but one game at a time—*Mr. C. is the best!* so have nothing to say to Sir H. beyond the fewest possible words of casual acquaintance.”

For some days after this, affairs went on very prosperously;—Theresa saw nothing of Sir Henry Wharton, except once at a distance on horseback, and Mr. Chetwode had become her shadow;—by her side in the morning—by her side in the evening—her attendant out walking—her companion in the house;—she sang, read, talked, and played chess, all for him, and the spider caught the fly!—Mrs. Dering's apt pupil performed her part well, and Mark Chetwode at last spoke the irrevocable words as he sat by her side on a pinnacle of the High Rocks, where, dizzy and alarmed, Theresa was

tremblingly hoping he would offer his hand to lead her down to *terra firma*, instead of making her the tender of it for life.

“Only let me descend, and I will thank you for ever!”

“But, Miss Dering, you have not answered me?”

“I give you my word I am getting giddy—a moment more, and I shall scream.”

“But, Theresa—just one word!”

“Fifty thousand if you will assist me in this most perilous descent.”

“Theresa!—say yes or no!”

“What?—will one do as well as the other? were I not afraid you would never help me down, I would say no, then!”

“Steps are approaching—and voices—let me entreat you to put an end to my suspense.”

“Mr. Chetwode, how very unfair it is, to take such advantage of my helpless position—we must look supremely ridiculous to those

people down below, who are staring at us as if we were a pair of Archangels !”

Mr. Chetwode assisted her down the rocky ledge, and across the deep though narrow chasm, and then he paused and looked at her.

“ You have taken me by surprise...” said Theresa, coquettishly.

Mr. Chetwode was inwardly rejoiced to think how well, in that case, he had succeeded in concealing his preference ;—poor man...but never mind...

“ I have no idea how to answer you,” she added.

“ Is it so difficult to utter one word ?” asked Mr. Chetwode.

“ *Cela dépend!*—some words are more difficult than others.”

“ In the present case, Theresa, were the word I wish to hear, so very difficult for you to pronounce, I should be more mortified, more grieved, and more disappointed, than your light spirit could ever understand !—I do not

believe you give me credit for one half the adoration I feel for you !”

This was the boldest speech Mark Chetwode ever made in his life, and he almost expected to see it have some miraculous effect on her ; but to the beautiful Theresa, such words were lukewarm !—Her ear had been too long accustomed to terms of admiration, and adoration as well, to be startled by a phrase which sounded to her, the most commonplace in the world ; consequently, instead of thinking it at all serious, she laughed.

“ Oh, yes, Mr. Chetwode—I give you credit for everything that is praiseworthy.”

Mr Chetwode began to feel piqued, and for several moments he was silent—just as he had made up his mind how to resume the conversation, they turned a corner, full upon a large party by whom Theresa was instantly surrounded, and then, farewell all hope of another such opportunity !

The Whartons, who had never been very

cordial with Mrs. Dering in Paris, where their notice might have been very advantageous to her, now appeared all anxiety to overwhelm with attentions the beautiful and showy looking girl, who was the object of evident devotion to the individual with the good name, and the good horses; Theresa was world-wise enough to see this, and she received the civilities with more the air of one patronizing, than being patronized!

Meanwhile, every tone of her voice, and every expression of her countenance, was planting fresh laurels for her in the opinion of Mr. Chetwode; though his *tête-à-tête* had been interrupted, and his declaration nipped in the bud, he had gained an immense amount of peace of mind by having thus witnessed with his own eyes, the conduct of Theresa towards one, at whom she had been said to have made a "desperate set," and though he had to place her in the carriage by his mother's side, and pursue his solitary way home on horseback

without having been able to say a single word more to her, still he was happy, for a load was taken off his mind, and his heart, though far from feeling satisfied, was lightened of the burden of suspicion and jealousy, under which it had sighed for so many weeks.

The moment Theresa reached the house, she went to her own room; she threw off her bonnet, and flinging herself on her bed, closed her eyes upon outward objects, that she might the better draw in her own mind a comparison between the two destinies, which were apparently only waiting her selection.

In person, she did not attempt to compare Sir Henry Wharton and Mr. Chetwode; the former was a Fine Young English Gentleman, gay, gallant and good looking; the latter had but few personal attributes, and he required to be known long and well, before even his mental excellences could be duly appreciated—besides the young girl who had withstood Captain

Sydenham's attractions, was not likely to be fascinated by mere outward appearance.

No—Theresa was tired of poverty—she was very fond of dress, and very fond of show ; she had never had a farthing she could spend as she pleased, that is, she had never known the luxury of being able to throw away money, and a carriage of her own had always been her ambition. Whilst smarting under some of the slights which the rich so seldom receive, she had often breathed with bitter fervency the vow, that money, money, money, should be the only magnet that should draw her into marriage;—independance she did not care for—but riches she coveted and had not!—and thus, which would be the best match, Sir Henry Wharton or Mr. Chetwode?

The paragraph in Mrs. Dering's letter relative to the two aspirants, rather perplexed Theresa, for in the eyes of the world, the title of the former would give him the preference over plain Mr. Chetwode, and certainly in Paris, her

mother had done her utmost to encourage him in every way. Why then did she now caution her daughter against playing a double game, and pronounce Mr. Chetwode "the best?"

Theresa weighed both sides carefully—she even put the relations of each into the scale, and the two Miss Whartons, pretty young girls, not likely to retain their maiden names for ever, were weighed against Mark's sole and single sister, whose hopeless old-maidism would render her an everlasting appendage to her family. Besides Theresa had never liked Marian Chetwode—she had an antipathy to plain people, and poor Marian was not of an age which improves as time wears on—her goodness, gentleness, and kindness were all lost on the beauty—Marian was decidedly a great spoke in the wheel!

Theresa forgot all this time, that she was already compromised to a certain extent, by the manner in which she had received Mark Chetwode's proposal; she never saw till the next

morning how clearly he had construed her silence into consent, and how completely he behaved as though a tacit engagement subsisted between them.

Except however this behaviour on his part, no opportunity occurred that whole day, for him to renew their conversation. Theresa avoided every chance of a *tête-à-tête*, and it was not till the next morning, after the arrival of the post, that she condescended to grant his request of a few moments' interview, and left the room after it, engaged to become his wife.

The post had that morning brought another letter to Theresa from her mother. A letter so painful, so humiliating in character, that it had urged the daughter to put an end to all doubt and deliberation, and led her to wind up her career without one instant's unnecessary delay.

"Time flies very fast," wrote the wily widow, "and your sister's marriage approaches rapidly; in three weeks more Mr. Keating has requested

that it shall take place, although I tried hard for another month, trusting that some stroke of fortune might possibly draw both my darling girls to the altar on the same day; but you tell me nothing!—I only hope you are not throwing away your time on Sir Henry Wharton, for his losses lately have been so tremendous that I hear he is almost a beggar. I find Mr. Keating more troublesome than words can express—I hope my Theresa will give me a more dutiful son-in-law, for he has overthrown every plan that I had imagined for the advantage of Georgy. He insists on seeing everything she buys, and told me yesterday that he should defray every debt in the world before he married, and expected that I should place Georgy in his hands equally clear!—Picture to yourself my position!—what can I buy? or rather, what can I pay for?—Of course I wished Georgy to have a handsome trousseau, intending to have had it all settled afterwards—but now.....with my small means, just imagine

my position !—Theresa, my darling, my whole trust is now in you !”

With burning cheeks, Theresa had read and re-read the above. Her mother’s meanness struck her far more than Mr. Keating’s unkindness ; she even felt that he was right in being so careful, for it showed he had fathomed the depth of the being to whom he was about to be so nearly allied for life, and it did not appear that he made the daughter suffer for the mother’s faults, as Georgy’s letters told every day of some handsome present, or kind act on his part towards her.

“ But it decides me,” said Theresa to herself as she re-folded the letter, and glanced up at her flushed cheeks, “ Mr. Chetwode has been pleased to fall in love with my face—he is too rich to descend to the items which occupy the attention of Mr. Keating ; he evidently sees no one but my unworthy self on the face of the earth ; consequently I will have him, and all these dreadful “ways and means” which

seem to worry mamma to death, will be laid aside for ever; Mr. Keating may be a good match and a good man too, but he would not do for me any more than he suits Mamma!—my mind is made up and I will forget all the past. Mr. Chetwode is the best husband in the world for me, and therefore I will marry him;—he is good, he is kind, he is a fright too—but then it will save me from jealousy!—but better than all, he is *manageable*, and I shall be able to turn him round my finger!—Consequently, excellent Mark Chetwode, I am yours!”

And he was accepted.

CHAPTER XIII

MARK CHETWODE was radiant with his happiness, and yet it seemed to bewilder him.— Who is there who does not remember the bewilderment of the first few days of that changed state, when two beings out of a universe, have taken upon themselves to agree that they will live, *with* each other and *for* each other, till the silent visiter, Death, shall step in to sever them? The Law has not as yet bound them, nor the Church sanctified them, but the

vows have been made, and the pledges taken, and those two feel they are to be one, and a certain awe creeps over them, for it is an awful thing to take a vow of any kind, much more a vow which involves such an infinity of misery should any adverse circumstance occur to divide the unity which they have so solemnly sworn to each other.

So, even on the light nature of Theresa Dering, the spell operated, and she was silent and subdued for the rest of the day.

On Mr. Chetwode the effect was different; to him the future was brilliant and the past nothing but a blank, for he had never known what it was to have a preference or even to admire.

Of Theresa, nothing need be said, for her history is before us—and yet an innate sense of duties and responsibilities about to arrive, damped her merriment, and tinged her manner with a gentleness which raised her infinitely in

the eyes of those, who were scanning her with such deep interest.

In the few moments of solitude which she was able to steal, her mind, in spite of herself, rather wandered back to days gone by, and she repeatedly asked herself the question—
“ Shall I be happy ? ”

All have asked themselves that same question under similar circumstances—to some it has been answered by a ready, fearless, and trusting affirmative, whilst others have doubtingly and tremblingly hoped the best, but dreaded to look forward to the long, long line of years, when the heart should hold no other love, and the spirit own no other master, than the one now chosen.

Of these was Theresa ;—she hoped she should be happy—she meant to try and be so, but she felt that it was by no means certain, and when she was received by Mrs. Chetwode and her daughter with the agitated warmth which put the finishing stroke to her accepta-

tion of Mr. Chetwode, an involuntary wish that she dare change her mind, and even now retreat, arose in her heart.

This feeling is not uncommon—many who have begun the career with far more affection than characterised the present proposed union, have felt, after the acceptation, the same strange unaccountable longing to retreat, which now influenced Theresa. It is the reaction, after the feelings and spirits have been wound up and tightly strung, and only one instance of the many contradictions of human nature.

But a few days afterwards the *fiancée* was re-assured. A buoyant letter of delight and congratulation arrived from Mrs. Dering to her daughter, and another to Mrs. Chetwode, the latter very prettily worded, and expressing in one breath her joy at the union of the families, and in the next her maternal grief at the double event, which would deprive her of both

daughters, "a separation to which she had been foolish enough *never to look forward!*"

Then came a very tolerable effusion from Mrs. Bellingham. As she said to Mary Vere, the mischief being done, it was better to put a good face upon it, and welcome the girl, than appear annoyed and offended, which would only fill the mother with triumph at the success of her schemes. She therefore wrote the customary phrases, and sat down to think over the match with an inward consciousness that her own conduct had been noble and generous in the extreme, for not preventing it!

Meanwhile all was contentment at Tunbridge Wells. The assiduity of the intended mollified the manner of Theresa, who, since her engagement, had manifested more reserve than he liked, but now that was dissipated, and his perseverance was gradually reaping its reward.

Every day, every hour, every minute, Mark Chetwode adored more and more the lady of

his love—even the coquettish imperativeness with which she ordered him about, was admirable in his eyes, and his slavery was Elysium to him.

But on Mrs. Bellingham, who, in order to put the “*comble*” to her graciousness had actually come down to the hotel for a week, Theresa’s dictatorial behaviour, though veiled beneath much fascination, made no very agreeable impression.

She could not bear to see her nephew Mark so changed by the fairy’s wand; so devoted, so subservient, so obedient! so very grateful for being accepted as the husband of the penniless beauty, as to forget that the advantages were ten thousand fold more on her side than his own!—besides, as she remarked to her companion,

“It is all very well to play the pretty tyrant before marriage, but I have my doubts if the tyranny is not natural to her—the girl’s head is turned by sudden prosperity, and if Mark

allows her to rule him as his wife as she does as his bride, he will be that most contemptible of all creatures, a Hen-Pecked Husband!"

But Mark, as has been before said, revelled in his slavery, hugged his chains, and anticipated every wish of the enslaver before even uttered, imagining, in all the frenzy of perfect delusion, that he was going to marry one whom all loved, admired, and approved as much as himself!—His mother's assent, so reluctantly and so sorrowfully given, his sister's opinions, extorted with such difficulty because unfavourable, and his aunt's undisguised and vehement opposition, all this was forgotten! Mark Chetwode had thrown off the reins that had so long and so gently guided him, and had put into his own mouth the bit by which he was contented to be in future governed.

The presence of Mrs. Bellingham had not this time disturbed the general harmony; the old lady was on her best behaviour, and she would sit silent by the hour, with her eyes

fixed on Theresa's face, apparently pleased at its perfect loveliness, and forgetting for the time that she was a daughter of Mrs. Dering.

But Theresa felt lonely ; she inwardly sighed for her sister, in spite of her outward joyousness ; she wanted Georgy's ear in which to pour out her spirit ; she wanted Georgy's steady voice to assure her that she had done right, and that India and its trials would never have proved her proper vocation—in fact she wanted some voice to say “ You never could have been happy as Edward Sydenham's wife ; forget him as entirely, as by this time, he has no doubt forgotten you ! ”

It was not likely that either Mrs. Chetwode or Mrs. Bellingham could be the friend for whom Theresa languished ; neither could she ever talk any but grave conversation with her silent sister-in-law-to-be ; to all these she felt as if she were continually acting a part, consequently there was no soul to whom she could relax save Mary Vere.

Idiot as it was the fashion to call this young girl, there was something pleasing and winning about her, even about her nonsensical romance—besides she knew Paris and everybody in it, and she had a memory which retained every particle of gossip which her gifted ears picked up; consequently Theresa soon made friends with her, as the saying is, and Mary Vere very soon began to look upon Theresa with something approaching veneration, because the list of her lovers appeared perfectly interminable!

“But you never cared for any of these?” asked she one day, as they sat waiting on the common for Mark, who had gone down to the library for books for Theresa.

“No,” was the laconic but guarded reply; “I never did; I never cared for any of these.”

“How strange,” returned Mary Vere, with a sigh—“how singular—and yet how happy! never to have had an attachment!”

Theresa was silent.

“Strange also,” continued her romantic

companion, "that Mr. Chetwode always used to say as a young man—I mean he has always said as long as I have known him—that the being of his idolatry should have worshipped at no worldly shrine but his own."

"Rather a poetical resolution," said Theresa, with an almost imperceptible smile curling her lip—"beautifully poetical for Mr. Chetwode."

"Perhaps I may have clothed his original idea in language of my own—but that was his sentiment, and it is a curious coincidence that though he has chosen one who has been so very much admired, she herself has never had an attachment!—what an additional source of happiness for him!"

"Very," was all Theresa said, but she was not thinking of the word uttered, for her thoughts were far away, and her eyes on an approaching figure.

Mary Vere followed their direction, and recognised Sir Henry Wharton.

“One of the many,” she whispered, and both laughed.

“How did you know that?” asked Theresa.

“Because we met him everywhere in Paris—he made your name a familiar sound to us—but had we not better rise, for he is evidently coming to join us, and Mr. Chetwode, perhaps, may—”

“Nonsense,” interrupted Theresa, with a toss of her proud head; “surely Mr. Chetwode does not think that my engagement to him has annihilated all my former acquaintances; if he does he is mistaken—if he objects—why, he must!”

And they certainly were joined by the individual in question, and his reception was not such as to discourage him from throwing himself down on the grass by their side, and entering into a noisy, silly, giggling conversation, such as young ladies love to indulge in at watering-places for the amusement, edification

and ridicule, of any who may chance to be within sight and sound.

Theresa wished in her heart that Mr. Chetwode might come and take his first lesson in jealousy at that moment, but it was some time before they were interrupted, and then her humour had changed—the “spirit of her dream” was very far from being the same.

“Look at that white hat,” said Sir Henry in the course of their *enfantillages*—“how soberly and slowly it moves up the common just behind the rocks; the old gentleman finds the hill too steep for him; the rocks are very much the colour of his hat—I have a great mind to have a shot at it—what will you bet I don’t hit it?”

“Do not,” exclaimed Theresa quickly, for she recollected that Mark had worn a white hat that morning—“I beg you will not—it may be some one we know.”

“What if it be? We shall never be suspected.”

“ *We* indeed ! it may be Mr. Chetwode then.”

“ Again, what if it be ?”

“ You forget I am staying at his house, and possibly a stone shot at his hat may not be so agreeable to him as to you.”

There was a pause of several minutes, and Sir Henry was screwing up his eyes in the sunshine, watching the white hat approaching, when suddenly an idea seemed to occur to him, and he abruptly asked Theresa if she had heard anything lately of Captain Sydenham ?

She kept her countenance well ; there was no blush, no shadow, no emotion of any kind as she quietly replied, no ; that she had heard nothing of him since his regiment sailed for India, and then she carelessly turned her head, so as to avoid any glance which he who questioned, might bestow on her.

“ Very good fellow,” began Sir Henry
“ I always liked Sydenham and I was very glad when I heard of his good luck ; you know,

Miss Dering, he was a devoted admirer of yours once upon a time."

"You should not say once upon a time," retorted Theresa, in agonies lest this serious flirtation which she had so studiously concealed, should be revealed to Mary Vere—"a devoted admirer should exist for ever—you ought to take it for granted that the flame never even flickers;—"

"Well, I will—only you know he is not here, so I thought possibly.....however, pray tell me, as I know he was a *protegé* of Mrs. Dering's, what the income part of it is? Some say a thousand, and some six hundred."

"I am in the dark," replied Theresa, "I do not know to what you allude."

"I mean whether the old lady left money as well as house and land?"

"What old lady?"

"His great aunt, Miss Sydenham;—she lived near Dublin, and surely you know that it

was her sudden death that prevented Sydenham's going to India?—that it was her will which made him sell out?—why, London was ringing with it, for everybody liked Sydenham!”

“ I have not been in Town lately,” was all that Theresa uttered.

She spoke hastily, and a casual observer might have thought that she was dismissing the subject as one which was too indifferent to engross her attention, for she kissed her hand as the words passed her lips, to the distant white hat!—but who could tell what was passing in that young girl's mind?—who could tell the dreadful change that that sentence had effected?—who could tell the sudden sinking of the beating heart?—the cold, faint, sickness which crept over her, and the hopeless, utter despair of learning that he whose absence only had nerved her to the tremendous sacrifice which she had bound herself to make, was actually in the same kingdom with herself!—what mattered miles between them? hearts

do not count miles!—to her imagination, he was almost by her side—he was overlooking her conduct—aware of her engagement—an eye-witness of her baseness!—She had thrown his love aside because India was his destiny—and now—how soon he must learn that before even the very ship that was supposed to bear him away, could have been much more than just out of sight of their native land, she had given herself away—she had forgotten all, all, all, and consequently her last interview with him, and everything connected with it, must now appear in his sight, as one consummate piece of acting, deceit, and treachery!

That there *is* such a feeling as the heart dying within one, many will acknowledge;—Theresa could have groaned at that moment, little as she knew!—Though she spoke no other syllable than the few cold words, “I have not been in town lately,” she would have given worlds to have enquired into every minute particular, and this too, whilst Mr. Chetwode

was actually within hearing—but she dared not !

Mary Vere was not too great an idiot to see that something more than usual was agitating that beautiful face—curiosity led her to gaze on the paleness that pervaded every feature, and sympathy made her pity the powerful emotion which could so change, one so light-hearted, and so proud.

Theresa did not mind those scrutinizing eyes;—it was too late in the day for her to care for observation—she was too wretched to challenge, or to shrink from it, and all she could do was, to make one great effort to recover herself, before Mr. Chetwode came up.

“ We must be going,” said she, rising with a slight laugh, and resumed—“ We are *called for*, you see, Sir Henry !”

“ By whom and why ?

“ By the individual at whose ha you wished to have a shot.”

“ But why should you go ?”

“ Because we have been only waiting for him.”

“ Happy man to have two such charges.”

“ Oh, no,” simpered Mary Vere, lingering a little behind, after Theresa bowed her farewell and advanced to meet Mr. Chetwode, “ not two ; I am nobody ! it is only Miss Dering.”

“ You do not mean it ?” cried Sir Henry, all aghast ; “ nothing serious, eh ? Good Heavens ! and I called him an old gentleman, and talked of having a shot at his hat !”

Theresa’s altered countenance did not fail to attract the notice of him who would have seen the faintest shadow of difference in it, even to one tint faded, and his anxious enquiries annoyed and irritated her ;—she was in no mood to bear his tender solicitude—within the last hour, that which had once flattered, now disgusted her, and she answered with a petulance she had never before exhibited.

The rest of the walk home passed in silence ; why Theresa was silent we need not ask, but

Mark Chetwode's reverie arose from a vague feeling of keen and bitter disappointment to think, that his perfect, his beautiful Theresa, could look unamiable and speak ill temperedly! that something most unusual had occurred to discompose her, was the only reason and excuse he could devise, and after dinner, leaning over her chair, he summoned up courage sufficient to again entreat her to tell him what was the matter.

“ Was she ill ?”

“ Dear no!—I am never ill—if you expect to find me ill now and then, and interesting, you will be so disappointed, dear Mr. Chetwode, for I am never ill by any chance.”

“ An unspeakable blessing, dearest Theresa ! but you were so pale when I joined you.”

“ Was I ?—well, I am sure I did not know it—one never knows when one turns pale—is it not odd ? and yet if one blushes, how plainly one feels it.”

“But your appearance made me uneasy, my Theresa!”

“Gracious! is it possible? you must conquer such anxiety! why should you be uneasy if I seemed merry and well? how can I help looking pale now and then? but honestly speaking, and joking apart, Sir Henry Wharton is the most wearisome being in existence, and you were so long away, that I was fairly worn out!”

Mrs. Bellingham heard this speech, and at the remark relating to Sir Henry Wharton, Mark Chetwode glanced triumphantly at her, but it was all the old lady could do, to restrain herself from holding up her hands, so thunder-struck was she, at the audacity of her intended niece; as for Mark himself, his mind was quite relieved, and he thought Theresa's excuse an ample and most probable apology, for her change of countenance.

Not so Mrs. Bellingham—she had an eye as

sharp as a needle, and saw through the piece of deception in a moment. Theresa saw she did, too, and that only increased their mutual distrust and dislike.

“Do you like her better?” asked Mrs. Chetwode, when, pleading fatigue, Theresa had retired for the night—“do you feel more ready to own that the failings of the mother had rather unjustly prejudiced you against the daughter?”

“Not yet,” answered Mrs. Bellingham; “but I have made a resolution to say nothing before Mark, as it is a subject on which he cannot keep his temper—one piece of advice however, I think I am justified in giving, because such an attachment as his, may lead him into the error which I hope he will avoid, and that is, when you are married, Mark, do not allow yourself to be hen-pecked! that is all I have to say!”

The bridegroom-elect laughed; the idea of being hen-pecked by Theresa was so good, so

pleasing, so amusing ! but he was a bachelor, and he did not know, poor good man, that the rod of authority beneath which it is so delightful to bow before marriage, is anything but agreeable afterwards ; that to be governed before marriage is flattering, but after, degrading ; thus, Mrs. Bellingham's caution was amusing to a degree to him, and his reception of her advice exceedingly irritating to her.

“ He is lost,” said she to Mary Vere that night ; “ it is no use troubling myself about him, but if ever a man was taken in, it is Mark Chetwode ! the girl is Mrs. Dering all over again, only more skilled than even her mother was at her age ; I saw that, when I caught her eye as she spoke of Sir Henry Wharton ; however, I shall say no more—I shall only watch her.”

CHAPTER XIV.

BUT Theresa unwittingly destroyed this plan set to watch her, for she rejoined her mother. The week of Georgina's wedding was approaching, and the sisters wished to be together before the great separation took place; therefore at Mrs. Chetwode's earnest request, Mrs. Bellingham consented for once to travel with a bodkin, and placing Mary Vere in that honourable position, deposited the *fiancée* in Hill Street, without having come to either words or blows on the journey.

Theresa was rapturously welcomed home ;—all seemed cordially to approve the deed she had done during her absence, and evenon Victor's ferociously friendly face, a smile beamed complacently.

The eyes that perhaps gazed with most interest and anxiety, were those of Georgina, for she wished to see how Theresa felt on the subject, and she trusted more to her countenance than her words. Mr. Keating already treated her quite as a brother, and laughed and jeered according to his usual manner.

Of course the confusion of the house was great—it was worse even in that house than in most from whence such weak and worldly pageants as “gay weddings,” issue forth, for the Derings were untidy people, and Mr. Keating's lodgings being small, he had added heaps of his own packages and parcels to Georgy's—thus the engaged sisters had hardly a moment together, except those they stole as they knelt by half-packed boxes, and then,

tears in the eyes of each, they could scarcely talk of anything but how much one would miss the other.

“What *shall* I do without you Theresa!”

“Ah, Georgy!—but you will have your husband!”

“So will you—Mr. Chetwode is so good, you know—so thoroughly good, and excellent, everybody says.”

“Still my loss is greater than yours—marrying Francis Keating is like marrying into one’s own family—now, *I* shall be all amongst strangers.”

Mr. Keating’s voice at this moment vociferated “Georgy” up the stairs;—he had upset the ink on the drawing-room carpet—“If you had not been dawdling up stairs, you know this would not have happened.”

“Indeed I was not dawdling, Francis—I was very busy over that large portmanteau of yours; the accordion is in, but...”

“I am sure I heard Theresa’s voice.”

“Yes, but I was arranging the soft things round the accordion all the time—I assure you I have not lost a moment—Good gracious!” she exclaimed, as she came within sight of the drawing-room—“Mrs. Chetwode’s poor carpet!”

“Well?—it was not my fault—if people choose to lend their houses they must take the consequences;—I was merely writing my name on this unbound music, when over went the inkstand.”

“Mr. Keating!” cried Theresa, as they re-ascended after the accident had been attended to, “do you not remember what housemaids say when anything is broken?—‘I didn’t do it, Ma’am—it come a-two in my hand!’”

Conversations of this kind were of such hourly occurrence, that Theresa soon became convinced, to her surprise, that it was the usual manner and habit of speaking which Mr. Keating had adopted towards her sister. Nothing could be more matrimonial than their dialogues, and no such sickening exhibition as

a love-scene ever passed between them—not a single term of endearment was ever used—not a glance of aught but mischief and merriment ever exchanged, and Theresa could not at all make out whether it were mutual good taste, or want of time, that deprived the community of those tender representations in which engaged couples, (and sometimes, also, even married ones,) are wont to indulge in public, to either the undisguised ridicule, or infinite disgust of their audience, and the spectators generally.

But in spite of the ceaseless interruptions, and the ‘confusion worse confounded,’ the wedding-day drew on apace, and intervals of rest at last dawned on that weary house. The tradespeople had obeyed all commands, the boxes had refused to contain any more, and a few days before the ceremony was to be performed, the Keatings *père et mère*, with a numerous troop of aunts, cousins, relations, and friends, arrived, and poured in and out of the house.

Victor himself grew exasperated at the knocks and rings, and at last sat down in the hall in despair, like a porter. Theresa marvelled at Georgy's unruffled placidity as claimant after claimant appeared for cousinly notice, and lounged in a chair with a contemptuous smile on her lips.

Then the eve of the wedding there was an evening party of these worthies, all dying to hear Georgina sing, and, naturally, her voice was not as firm and clear as usual, which put Mr. Keating so much out, that he went walking about the room, saying to every one,

"Bad, bad ;—nothing to what she *can* do—quite out of voice—no voice at all in fact."

"If I were my sister," said Theresa quietly, as soon as he came near enough to her chair for her observation to be audible, "I would not sing a note for you !"

And when the sisters sat together that last night, talking over their plans, she earnestly besought Georgina not to yield too much to

the caprices of her husband—not to allow him such complete sway as never to stand up for herself, when he made those exceedingly disagreeable remarks.

“What does it signify?” laughed Georgina, “they were all pleased, though I was not in my best voice—Francis was quite right there;—and as to his remarks being disagreeable, really I am so accustomed to them, that I hardly hear what he says!”

Theresa leant her head on her hand and mused, for it was not till now that she saw how very differently constituted were herself and sister! but then they were going to marry very different men. *Thérèse* felt certain that she and Mr. Keating would not live together a week. “A sort of man who would exasperate me into a frenzy,” said she, and Georgina laughed heartily.

And now came the last hours;—the closing of the imperial—the packing of the little Berlin basket in which was a half finished purse

for the bride's employment, and a costly smelling bottle for the transit from Dover to Calais, with various other little treasures which every one knows form part of the comforts of a young lady on a journey; then the entrance of the dishevelled mother into the chamber of the sisters, to see that one was not retarding the other, and then the coffee tray, over which in choking silence, the trio tried to fortify themselves for the approaching parting.

Lastly, the arrival of Isidore without whose assistance Mrs. Dering must have given up the ghost altogether, so obstinately indifferent was Georgina as to how her wreath was to be placed.

But now it was all done, and the carriage was at the door. A sufficient number of minutes had elapsed after the time appointed, for the bridegroom to tremble, fret, and fume, in the vestry; and then, cold, shivery, and smart, the group stood round the altar.

Great was Mrs. Dering's satisfaction in that

hour—though she managed by dint of great exertions to squeeze out a tear or two, joy was in her heart as people wished her joy, and as her twinkling eyes turned towards her remaining daughter, that beautiful bridesmaid, she ejaculated in a voice whose tremulousness did her infinite credit,

“But I must command myself, for how soon alas, I shall have to go through it all again!”

After all this came the closing scene of all—the company going out on the balcony, the travelling carriage driving up—Mr. Keating handing in his wife, and dashing in after her, drawing down the blinds in a violent rage at the staring of the assembled crowd, and then the start—that was the last of it, for the pair denominated, “happy couple,” are fairly off, the guests are sick of the sight of each other, and call for their carriages generally in unseemly haste, dying to get home and change the stiff new dresses, and command the death and destruction of the favours which are so

prone to stay the footsteps of admiring passers by.

And then for the first time Mrs. Dering sighed and sought for rest—the rest of a chair, for, during her visit to that distracted house, there had hardly been one to sit upon from morning till night, and by her side, in silence, sat Theresa.

They had much to say to each other, and many plans to arrange—so many that they did not know where to begin.

After most marriages, the fault generally is, the tame idleness of the rest of the day, but in the present case, this was not possible. Mrs. Dering had just delicacy enough to see that she could not remain an hour longer, that was unavoidable, in the house which had been lent to her solely and simply for the wedding, particularly under the circumstances, therefore the instant her wedding attire was doffed, she donned the suit in which she was wont to claim the pity and consideration of lodging-

house people, and prepared to go out and hunt for an abode, from whence to launch her showy Theresa.

“If you had played your cards well,” said she to her daughter, as she pulled her smart little bonnet over her face and tried to make it look dowdy, “we should have been asked to Mrs. Bellingham’s, instead of having to hunt for lodgings. I assure you I am almost in the Queen’s Bench, and yet I suppose, considering the occasion, I must not put you over a shop, nor take you across Oxford-street.”

“The former, certainly not,” replied Theresa, “but as to the latter, where is the objection?”

“So far from Mr. Chetwode my dearest!”

Theresa’s mouth all but sneered.

“I should think my future husband hardly worth having, mamma, if he did not consider me worth some little trouble. Pray go to the end of the earth, if *that* is your only reason.”

The Chetwodes were only waiting Mrs. Dering's departure to come to town. They were all anxious to rejoin Theresa, and the intended was the most miserable being in existence without her—a regular pelican in the wilderness—so Mrs. Dering was obliged, in conscience, to please and suit herself with the least possible delay, in spite of Theresa's assuring her there was no hurry, as far as herself and Mr. Chetwode were concerned, for that a little tantalizing would do him good, and he would be all the better for the separation.

But the lodgings were engaged that day nevertheless, and Mrs. Dering began a game of endeavouring to conciliate Theresa's new family as much as she could, in order to make more of them than she had of the Keatings.

"No words can tell," she began, as she sat conversing with her daughter over the past, "no language can describe, how badly that young man has behaved! firstly, in the case of Victor—the very first request Georgina

ever made you know, and that was refused ! not glanced over, but refused point blank ! then secondly, about the bills—insisting that Georgy should have a *trousseau* in proportion to my fortune, and pretending that it was to spare my purse ! did the man think I meant to pay ?”

“ But you did pay ?” interrupted Theresa colouring.

“ Yes I did certainly, because I thought he was a man who might make Georgy miserable by and bye, if I did not, but I shall arrange better in your case my darling, for the bills shall not come in at all !”

Theresa made a movement of impatience and her mother proceeded.

“ Then about the settlements—imagine !—both he (and he has something independent of his father) and the old Major, absolutely refused to settle anything on Georgy ; in vain I beat about the bush—in vain I skirmished !—not one inch of ground, not one grain of satis-

faction did I obtain; — pin-money, fair enough — two-hundred a year—but as to what she was to have as a widow, not one word would Major Keating say, and his son was as deep himself. My dear, had your poor father been alive, we should have had no wedding to-day.”

All this, except as far as it concerned Georgy's happiness, was very uninteresting to Theresa; —her thoughts were elsewhere—sometimes with her absent sister, sometimes in Ireland, and often and often a question for the fate of the absent rose to her lips, and then her heart beat so fast and thick that she could not summon courage to pronounce the words; even with Georgy she had several times been on the point of saying,

“Where is he? what is he doing? and what is the story they tell of a fortune being left him?” but each time a something prevented her speaking—a feeling, that Georgy would think, considering her engagement to another,

that her thoughts had no business to dwell, or even rest, on one who had once so deeply engrossed them—and so the opportunities passed, one by one, and she remained in ignorance of all save the scanty information gleaned so accidentally from Sir Henry Wharton.

As soon as ever Mrs. Dering had left the old house in Hill-street, all prospect of thoroughly cleaning and embellishing was laid aside, and its inmates returned with the resignation of martyrs, to its dusty rooms, and dingy paperings.

To Mark Chetwode that house might have been either a palace or a pig-stye; he never would have distinguished the difference, for Theresa was in London, and his eyes were blind to all nature except herself.

No sooner was the early breakfast of Hill-street despatched, than he was off to do duty till dinner time with Mrs. Dering and her daughter, and hour after hour in half the shops of the metropolis, sat that patient man from

noon till sunset, pronouncing his verdict (that is to say Mrs. Dering made it appear so to him) on silks and satins.

In short, so entire was his devotion, that a fit of timidity which had attacked Mrs. Dering after Mr. Keating's unceremonious rebuffs, now gradually wore off, and her favorite project regarding Victor began once more to glimmer from the depths of her imagination—she broached the subject to Theresa, and to her surprise, Theresa hesitated.

“Do not mistake me, mamma,” said she hastily, when she saw her mother about to utter her astonishment, with her usual volubility, “do not think I am going to make any objections myself, for Victor would be exactly the servant I should choose had I to please myself, but Mark Chetwode is an odd man—he has peculiar notions and fancies—he has never crossed the channel in all his days, and looks upon France and the French with abhorrence—”

"But my dearest, have you never told him what a treasure..."

"I never mentioned Victor to him mamma, for he has always a grave, uncomfortable face when I talk of foreigners; he is such a thorough John Bull, that his prejudices are very strong—"

"You must conquer all such prejudices."

"Yes, but perhaps you do not know mamma, what Victor himself told Georgy and me? that there was actually room for him in the house till it was known that he was a Swiss, and then, full of Courvoisier, he was sent to a lodging in another street! Victor remembers that, and will remember it to his dying day, so perhaps as my name is to be Chetwode, he may not be so glad of the situation as you think."

"Yes—it was his own wish, his own request, and as he knows I cannot keep him, his anxiety is great."

"I will do my best," said Theresa after a pause, "I will see what I can achieve—as yet

I do not know my ground, nor the extent of either my power or my influence, but I will at all events try ;” and with this promise Mrs. Dering was satisfied, for she saw even more distinctly than did her daughter, the yielding character of the man with whom they had to deal.

This point at rest, she then proceeded to think over plans for her own future. Those resources which she used to term so prettily “my small means,” would now be a nice little income whereon to subsist during three months of the year, when she might not happen to be residing with either one daughter, or the other, and after due and mature deliberation she resolved that Paris should be her home.

From henceforth she knew that houses, hitherto bolted and barred against her, as not belonging to that particular “set,” would now fly open by the magic wand of her relationship to Mrs. Bellingham ; she knew that good letters of introduction were all she now required,

to enter higher circles than she had hitherto been able to attain, and she thought to herself with some complacency that a lively pleasing widow would be a greater acquisition to the society in which she had always longed to move, than the anxious and indefatigable mother of "*deux demoiselles à marier !*"

So far Mrs. Dering's star had risen to its altitude, and she proposed taking an apartment in the best quarter, and living in future to the end of her days in liberty and luxury, for the happiest time of her life seemed now fairly dawning.

Theresa cordially approved her projects ; she thought no spot so suited to her mother's tastes and habits as Paris ; England is not the country for people with "small means," and London was but one scene of endless mortification to Mrs. Dering, for the English love to pay so dearly for every species of enjoyment, that the least little indulgence in that wealthy

metropolis cost her more in one day, than a whole week's gaiety and amusement, in Paris.

Mrs. Chetwode was astonished at her friend's taste and selection; to her it seemed so strange that a mother should plume up her wings and absent herself from her offspring, the instant she had turned them out of her nest, and though the old lady said nothing to the gay widow herself, she could not refrain from remarking on it to her daughter-in-law elect, and wishing that her mother had placed herself more within reach.

"House rent is so ruinous in England, mamma says," was Theresa's defence, "and London is such an expensive place."

"But my dear Theresa, I am sure your mother might always reckon on her own room in this house at all events, and Major Keating has a large country house, has he not? thus she might depend almost, on a town and country life too, between the homes of her children."

“ Ah yes—but then mamma is so singular—she appreciates kindness so warmly, that it always pains her to encroach on her friends, and therefore she has quite made up her mind to have a *pied-à-terre*, where she would have most chance of seeing us—and you know it is so easy in these days to run backwards and forwards to Paris.”

Mark Chetwode looked up hastily to see if Theresa were joking, but there were no signs of it, and he looked down again with a vague feeling of wonder in his mind, as to whether he should ever find himself, by any miracle, in Paris!”

CHAPTER XV.

AND now in the quiet house in Hill-street began the first symptoms of preparation for the great change awaiting it—for the adding to its sober members, one who had led a gay and giddy life, and who seemed just the sort of young lady, as the old housekeeper declared, to turn the old house topsy turvy, and out of windows.

It was a remarkable fact, that, considering the peculiar beauty and fascination of the bride,

not one soul, from high to low, welcomed the match with the cordiality which a marriage generally awakens. The old housekeeper was decidedly of opinion that she was far too young and flighty for Mr. Mark, though of course he knew best.

Yes, Mr. Mark evidently thought he knew best, and was quite satisfied with his choice, for he never for one instant wavered in his opinion of her, and as time wore on, his days were spent still more and more, in thinking of her comfort, and devising plans for her happiness.

Considering the youth of Theresa, and the dimensions of the house in Hill-street, it had seemed the most natural plan that they should reside, at least for some months, beneath the roof of his mother, and Theresa had smilingly acquiesced.

“It will do for a time, but not for long,” remarked Mrs. Dering, in a private conference, one of those long whispering conferences which Mr. Keating had always purposely interrupted,

and Mr. Chetwode as studiously held sacred ;
“ You will not like it, my dear—an old lady,
and an old maid, will never do for you to live
with—but you can try you know.”

And thus the first homœopathic drop of poison was instilled into the composition of Theresa.

Next came a weighty question which Mr. Chetwode, with delighted eagerness, called upon Theresa to settle, and that was, what kind of carriage would she have ?

“ My mother has, with her usual generosity, offered us the free and constant use of hers,” said he, “ but I like my Theresa to have her own.”

“ You are all goodness ! I never attempt to thank you because I cannot say enough,” were Theresa’s words, and in her heart she laughed immoderately at the idea of her taking drives by turns, and at stated hours, with Mrs. and Miss Chetwode, in the cream-coloured chariot and obese horses !

When the discussion arose as to what coach-maker should have the honor and glory of building the new carriage, Mrs. Bellingham happened to be present, and she smiled in her sleeve at the simplicity of her nephew, in proposing to abide by the taste of the man, who had built his mother's antiquated chariot.

"The family colour," said Mrs. Bellingham, "is so peculiar, that it behoves you to be very cautious what builder you select; your mother's chariot was all very well in its day, but that day is gone by, and as you have made up your mind to have a good new carriage, go to a modern maker, and don't screw him down to a certain price; do it well whilst you are about it; if you employ Leader you will be in the right road, and if you go to Barker I should say you could not do better."

Theresa's sparkling eyes, fixed on the irresolute countenance of her intended, told how completely she entered into the sentiments of

the vehement old lady. Mark Chetwode little dreamt that, that young girl would rather have had no carriage at all, than one by a poor builder, or by one so unknown to fame as to cause a blush to rise to her cheek, when his unheard-of cognomen was questioned, or proclaimed.

No ; Mark knew she had always longed for a carriage of her own, and he could not enter into the feeling which made her look on the acquisition as very incomplete, were the builder of it, one whom she should be ashamed to acknowledge.

At all events, nothing could be decided until Theresa had gone over a few of the best shops with him, and chosen the style she most preferred. This she did the following day, and they went alone.

Now from the instant that Theresa's arm was placed within Mark Chetwode's to proceed on their expedition, a resolution, as fixed and

firm as her own will, had been formed in her mind, and that was, to prevail upon him to alter the family colour of the carriage.

But Mark came of an old-fashioned race, and he was an old-fashioned young man himself; he had whims, habits, and fancies, peculiar and firmly rooted, and she knew that to shake the deep-seated prejudice in favour of that odious cream colour, would be an Herculean task, but one which she was determined to perform, or else—decline the carriage! and in this spirit, they started on their way,—he, proud and joyous,—she, all smiles and sweetness.

They reached their destination; side by side they passed through the long lines of carriages and carefully examined each, till at last one was selected which equally suited the taste of both, and then Mr. Chetwode began entering into the details, price, size, equipments, and finally, colour.

“Though, as to that,” said he to the person in attendance, “your best plan would be to send

some one to Hill-street when you commence the painting, and desire our coachman to show you Mrs. Chetwode's present carriage."

"How?" whispered Theresa, hurriedly—"why should he do that? what has ours to do with that dear funny old chariot, Mr. Chetwode?"

"Nothing, my dear Theresa, except the colour, which perhaps you do not know has been used by our family from time immemorial."

"The colour? that dread—I mean that singular cream-colour? oh, no! you must be laughing!" exclaimed Theresa, with admirable surprise.

"Indeed I am not—I do not believe there ever existed a Chetwode who had a carriage of any other colour."

Theresa's countenance fell—her whole manner changed; she drooped, as it were, from that moment, and took no sort of interest in anything that followed, so much so, that Mr. Chetwode was quite miserable.

He expressed his regret and his vexation in the kindest terms, but still, it was evident the carriage was to be cream colour.

“How strange that it never occurred to me,” said Theresa, as they paced the damp manufactory, “that our carriage would be cream-colour! it never for an instant entered my imagination; I had always fancied I should have such a pretty turn-out! I had quite drawn it in my mind’s eye, even to the colour of the horses.”

“Well—those shall be any colour you please, but the carriage, my dear Theresa, will still be a very elegant one.”

“Oh, Mr. Chetwode! forgive me! but such a colour as that?”

“But, Theresa, I never heard you disapprove my mother’s?”

“No—but did I ever imagine it would fall to my happy lot to have one of my own?”

Mr. Chetwode was silent—perhaps from pure vexation; and it was Theresa who re-

sumed the conversation, in a lively tone of voice, as though some bright idea had suddenly struck her.

“ But tell me before we proceed—do tell me—is it absolutely necessary that I should have a carriage? could I not do without one?”

“ Certainly,” was his answer, “ there are individuals who manage to dispense with them, but I see no reason why you should—eh, Theresa?”

“ Far better than cause you any vexation—and I see you are vexed; why should I vex you? I, who owe you so much?”

“ You, Theresa! you owe me nothing—the debt is all on my side, Heaven knows!—but that is nothing to the purpose.”

“ Yes, it is; it never was my purpose to be the cause of any unpleasant discussion arising, and will not countenance any act that either has occasioned, or is likely to occasion you, any annoyance; dear Mr. Chetwode, you shall not order this carriage at all!”

And to Mark's astonishment Theresa appeared perfectly in earnest, and determined to give up the object of her ambition altogether.

How blind are lovers ! how blind must our lover in particular have been, when he only saw in this sudden but immoveable resolution, a most amiable trait in the character of Theresa. Rather than vex him by dissenting from his taste, she would resign what he knew she coveted more than any possession in the world.

The genius who stands at the elbow of a lover, embellishing every deed and word of the ruling divinity, is a very different spirit to that which takes its place by the side of the husband, aiding his impartial judgment, and brushing out of his eyes any of the glittering dust of delusion, that has been left from the days of their courtship. The latter would have placed the case in a very different light, and showed how, in wilful unamiability, but with hopes of eventual triumph lurking at the bottom, Theresa pretended she meant to give up the

carriage altogether, partly because it was a colour that did not happen to please her, and partly because she saw Mr. Chetwode more firm about having his own way with regard to it, than she had ever seen him before !

Be that as it may, she actually induced him to leave the coachmaker's with undecided words on his lips, and a state of most perplexing indecision in his mind, and they commenced their walk home, in silence.

This silence continued for many minutes—they had traversed many streets in the course of it, and by dint of stealing sly glances now and then at his face, Theresa could see that he was wavering as to what course to pursue, and she argued favourably of the result.

She was not wrong—his steps grew slower and slower, as they approached Hill Street, and at last stopping, he said,

“ Suppose, Theresa, we go and have an ice, and talk it over ? ”

Her cheerful acquiescence re-assured him,

and an eager and animated conversation ensued. Who will doubt how it terminated?—who cannot follow them through the mazes of their difficulties, and through the sophistry of their arguments! Who cannot hear Theresa gently insinuating that after all, what mattered the colour of a carriage? and Mr. Chetwode hesitatingly answering, that changing a colour was not like changing a livery—thereby opening the door for doubts to fly out, and conviction to fly in, and triumph to flap its gaudy wings over Theresa's victorious head.

Before the ices were well consumed, they had resolved to return to the coachmaker's and to order the equipage according to Theresa's taste, and they then returned home, each rejoicing in the success of their enterprise.

We said "each rejoicing;" and so they were; but the rejoicing was confined solely to themselves! for no sooner did it transpire that the family colour of the Chetwodes was about to be changed, that the order was given, and

that a portion of Theresa's firmness had communicated itself to Mr. Chetwode's decision, so that no astonishment, no indignation, and no arguments could move it, or prevail on him to countermand the decree, than dismay arose in the hearts of that quiet family, and even placid old Mrs. Chetwode was more hurt and annoyed than perhaps the occasion called for.

Be it remembered, however, that for many, many long and happy years, that colour had been associated in her mind with the husband she had lost—the father of her only son; she had become quite fond of it, and it had never entered into her imagination to think, that at the word of a young girl, and in the course of a few short hours, such a revolution would be effected!

Little things like these may seem trifling, but they grieve to the heart all the same, and Mrs. Chetwode's eyes filled with tears, though she turned away her head, as she thought of how she should like the new carriage, and its

strange colour—that colour which would mark her son's first infringement of family rules, and family prejudices.

As for Mrs. Bellingham,—little as it signified to her,—she took upon herself to be more irate and indignant than any one ;—the impertinence of this daring insubordination appeared to her immeasurable, for she was very certain that it was entirely the young lady's doing — not Mark's ;—bad as he was, he was not so lost as that; he would not have thus flown in the face of an old custom, had not some spirit more wicked than himself, set him up to it—indeed she now gave him up altogether as a hopeless case, and uttered so many bitter and painful remarks on the occasion, that Mr. Chetwode finally resorted to words stronger than any he had ever yet used, to impress upon her the fact of his independance to act, unfettered, and unreprieved, as regarded his fuure establishment.

And here the subject rested, or smouldered

rather, for it was of course always one of some slight awkwardness to all, and was consequently as much avoided as possible.

As in the case of Theresa, opposition here did a world of harm, and only made Mr. Chetwode more determined not to thwart the wishes of the gentle Theresa, to gratify the family pride, so vehemently expressed, of Mrs. Bellingham, whom it could not in anywise concern!

And now the four and twenty hours, denominated the "happy day" of a man's life, approached rapidly. Mr. Chetwode was overwhelmed with business, and surrounded by lawyers, papers, and red tape.

He was acting magnificently by Theresa, who listened complacently to the deeds, which provided her with such abundant pin-money, and which would constitute her such a wealthy widow.

In those settlements there were no unhand-some reservations, no mean limitations—he was looking on her as the dearest and most va-

luable of his worldly possessions, and endowing her with his worldly goods with a free heart, and an open hand, till even Mrs. Dering exultingly told her, she was the luckiest girl in existence.

Lastly came the question of servants, and it being decided between them, that two would be necessary to accompany them on their wedding tour, though where they were to go was not yet thought of, Theresa seized the opportunity of putting in a word for Victor.

All the praise that had been showered on him to Mr. Keating, now came down, clothed in still more persuasive language, on the devoted head of Mark Chetwode. Theresa was very nervous as she watched his countenance, for she saw in it, all that she had told her mother, of doubt, dislike, and yet reluctance to deny her any request which she might make.

It was evident that Mr. Chetwode's prejudice against foreigners was very strong; he

had an Englishman's feeling against them as servants, that is, the feeling of an Englishman who has never left his own country, and he did not give Theresa an answer immediately—he said it was a subject that required some consideration, and deferred the decision till the next day.

“He is going to consult the old lady then,” cried Mrs. Dering, when she heard it, “and she, poor old soul, hates him because of Courvoisier!—now is your time Theresa—stand firm, or we shall lose the day.”

And Theresa did stand very firm, yet with such a pretty appearance of sacrificing herself, and her wishes, and comforts, that Mark was more charmed with her than ever, yet he held back from engaging Victor.

Even Marian opposed it! and why?—she evidently had her reasons, but all she said was, that he had given her the idea of being very sly and underhand. Mrs. Chetwode urged every possible reason against it, and finally re-

marked that except for the honeymoon, a man servant was superfluous to her son, since he was to return to his own home, where the two men had literally nothing to do.

“Very true,” replied Mr. Chetwode, “yet certainly Theresa should have a footman—if only to go with the carriage—in fact, she *must*.”

“A footman in moustaches will look very singular,” said his mother, and this was reported to Theresa.

“Put him on a hat and feathers,” said Mrs. Bellingham, when they were again canvassing the point, “and then he will be Mrs. Mark Chetwode’s *chasseur*.”

How unwise people are in their opposition! How very often a cause is lost, solely from some bitter remark! in the present case that sentence gained the enemy a move, and Theresa’s suggestion that Victor would be just the person to accompany them on their tour,

especially if dear Mr. Chetwode thought of a little trip abroad, found favor in the lover's sight.

"But then, my Theresa, it will be rather hard to dismiss, and throw him on the wide world, when we come home again."

"Oh, mamma will take him back—yes with, pleasure, I am certain she will."

"Then I had no thoughts of going abroad, my dear Theresa."

"Had you not?—well, where you like of course; only think how enchanting to join dear Georgy in Paris for a week or so! we should be a snug little *partie carrée* of English, and you would not have to speak a syllable of French, think how delightful!"

Mark Chetwode smiled—Theresa persisted—the day was won, and Victor was engaged as their servant. Paris was determined upon as their residence for a few weeks, and these measures were then announced to Hill-street,

by both Mark and his intended, and received with that silence which usually signifies the disapprobation which the lips are backward to utter ; and so ended all the arrangements.

The day arrived—a bright and cloudless October day—and again a wedding party, far less gay and far less numerous, left the old house in Hill-street, and returned there to breakfast, for Mrs. Chetwode had insisted on taking that part of the ceremony a second time off Mrs. Dering's hands.

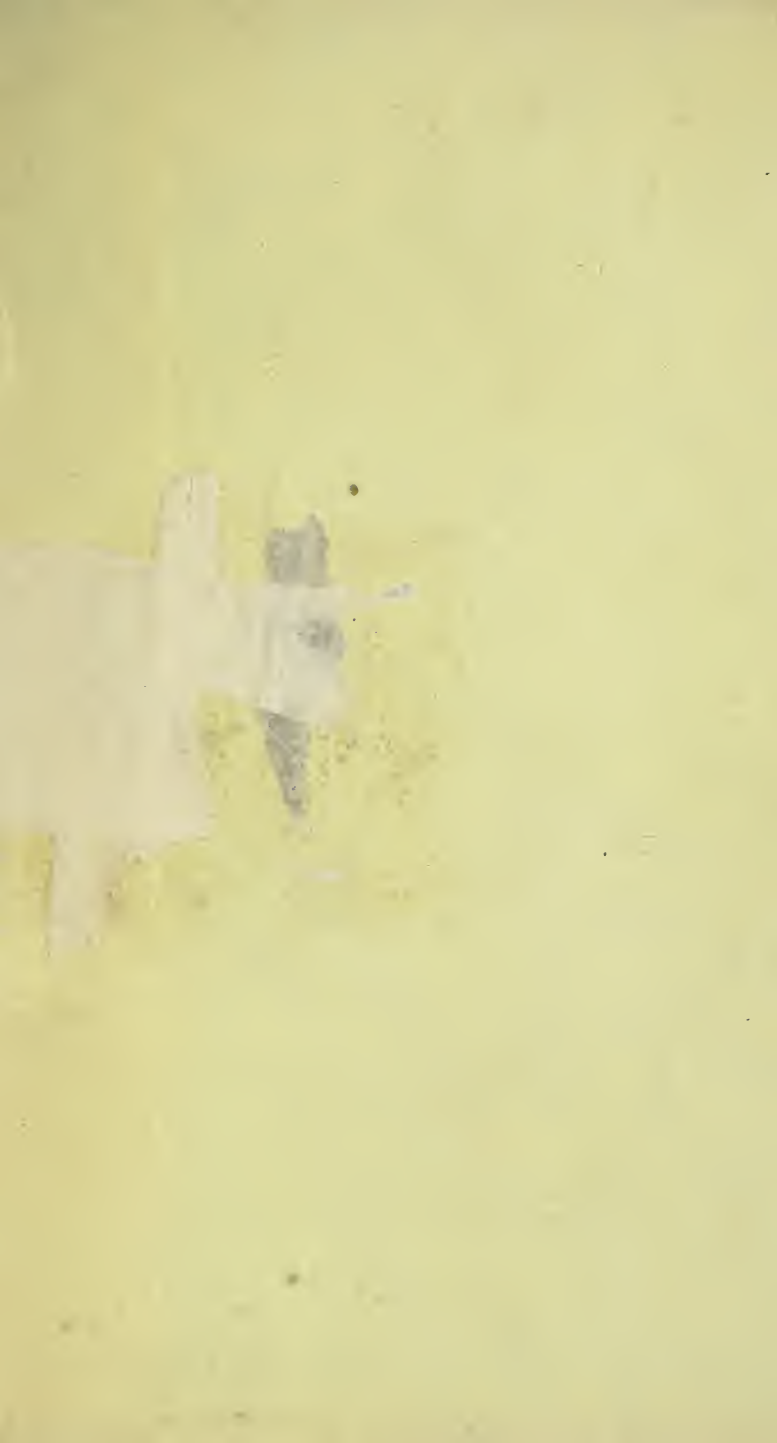
And Theresa sat by her husband's side with a trembling hand and a cheek rapidly changing from red to white ; her face looked too unhappy for the face of a bride, for as every one said, " Was ever any girl half so lucky ?" but still, there was a quiver in her voice, and tears constantly rising to her eyes, and not a sound issued from her lips, when, after the leave-takings were over, she was led to her own carriage, and whirled away towards the Dover-road.

She had fulfilled so much of her destiny ; she had gained the day in almost everything she had desired, yet sadness was in her heart, whilst every one around her, was exclaiming “ How beautifully the bride behaved ! ”

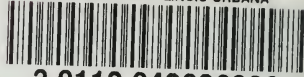
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